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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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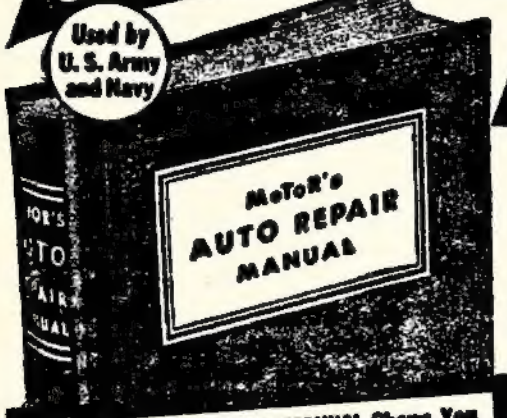

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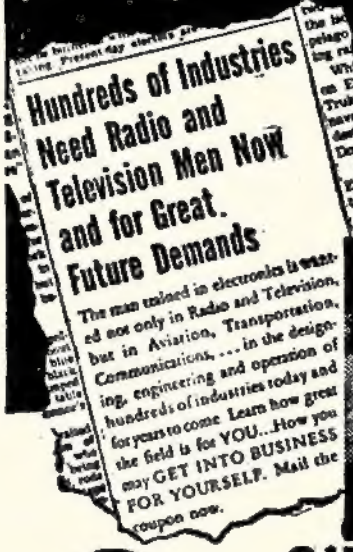

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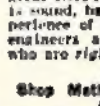

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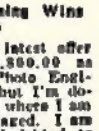

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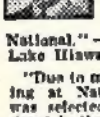

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The Valley of the Gods

GARTH ABBOTT was vividly aware of the danger for him in this night-shrouded place of the dead. He did not need the whispered warnings of his nervous companion to tell him what discovery of them here would mean.

It would mean, pretty certainly, the abrupt death of a too-bold young American archaeologist in this obscure little village on the Usumacinta River in upper Guatemala. The primitive folk here would deal swift vengeance to a foreigner whom they caught desecrating their cemetery.

Jose Yanez, the guide whom Abbott had picked up in Puerto Barrios, very obviously realized that to the full. His flat, swarthy face was pallid in the rays of their lantern.

"Senor Abbott, you don't understand," he persisted. "These people are mostly Indians, still savage. If they catch us—"

"They won't—they're all at the *baile,*" Abbott retorted. "Here, give me the lantern. You bring the crowbars."

The rays of the old-fashioned lantern vaguely illumined a jumble of ancient stone crosses. Behind them rose the dark, squat church, and farther behind was the marketplace from which rose a rhythmic dance music of marimbas, flutes and drums.

Abbott had a rough native cloak slung around his shoulders to ward off the night dew, but his tawny head was bare. And as he advanced through the solemn aisles of ancient crosses, his strong, rawboned face flared with excitement. He sensed himself on the verge of great discovery.

The somber eeriness of the ancient graveyard did not affect him. He ignored the evil-looking bush-vultures that boldly roosted on the stone markers and eyed the passing lantern like unclean spirits. Places of death were no novelty to an archaeologist, and he was immune to superstition.

"That's the mound just ahead!" he eagerly told his apprehensive companion. "Quick, bring along the tools!"

The mound rose squat and black just beyond the graveyard proper. It was a grassy hillock a dozen feet high, whose southern face had been partially washed away by recent rains.

Abbott had noticed that earlier in the day. His trained eyes had instantly fastened on the great hewn stones whose edges were exposed by the washout, and which bore chiselled Mayan glyphs.

The hillock concealed a Mayan tumulus of some sort. And Abbott had been set afire by his glimpse of one group of glyphs that spelled a magic name—the name "Xibalba."

Xibalba! That was the mythical lost birthplace of the Mayas, the legendary valley from which their strange race was fabled to have come, two thousand years before!

Did that fabled valley really exist somewhere deep within the unexplored Guatemalan mountain fastnesses? Many scholars had thought so. Stephens himself, the great pioneer of Mayan archaeology, had talked with a man who claimed to have seen Xibalba with his own eyes.

If lost Xibalba could be found, all the riddles of the mysterious Mayan civilization might be solved. The civilization that long ago had reared its mighty monuments and splendid stone cities from the lowlands of Honduras to the jungles of Yucatan, might then yield answers to the enigmas that had puzzled modern men.

Places of death are not feared by an archaeologist
—that is, most *places!*

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

THE mere fact that this tomb might be a clue to Xibalba had set Garth Abbott afire to excavate it. But when he had asked permission from the priest of the nearby church, he had met a check.

"I dare not permit that, senor! Pagan superstition still runs deep in many of my primitive flock, and that mound is to them a sacred, forbidden spot. You would risk your life by digging into it."

Abbott had refused to give up. He had told Yanez, "We'll wait until tonight when they're all at the fiesta and open the mound ourselves."

"But when they find out what we have done—" the Guatemalan had objected fearfully.

"They won't find out. I'll simply make flash-photos of all the inscriptions and then close it up again till later."

He had waited with intense eagerness all that day for night and the fiesta to come, feeling himself on the brink of a tremendous archaeological discovery.

Xibalba! The legend-haunted name rang in his mind like a golden bell. If he could find that fabled shrine of the Mayan gods and heroes, what might he not find there?

It had begun to rain softly now, as he and Yanez set their lantern on the ground and studied the raw earth side of the mound. The yellow clay almost completely hid the huge stones within.

Abbott estimated that the mound contained a low, round rock vault, most of it buried beneath the present ground-level.

"Clear that soil away—that's it," he directed Yanez. "Now we'll pry out one of these stones and see if it opens a way into the vault."

The big block they attacked was inscribed with the worn Mayan glyphs. Again, Abbott felt a leap of the pulse as he recognized the symbol for Xibalba—and also the one for "Kukulcan."

Kukulcan was the Mayan god of light and thunder, the great Plumed Serpent. Why was his symbol here? Abbott's eagerness grew.

The block suddenly gave way and slid out onto the wet clay. The lantern showed them a yawning black cavity.

Quivering with excitement, Abbott squirmed through the square opening. In the darkness within, he lowered himself to a stone floor. Yanez passed through the lantern, and Abbott stared.

"Good God, what a find!"

The interior of the vault was a brilliant little treasure-chamber of mystery.

Its chief object was a wonderful stone sarcophagus, over which reared the coils and grotesque head of the Plumed Serpent.

"The serpent of Kukulcan! This is early Mayan, all right. But the Mayans never entombed anyone like this!"

He stared incredulously around the chamber. Its walls were a brilliant pageant of painted sculptures.

Not two thousand years had dimmed the cunning color of those marching figures. They were Mayan of the Old Empire's earliest period, those columns of priests, warriors and captains.

The pictured pageant represented a great migration. Above the marching columns of stiff figures extended a queer running chart that showed mountains, ranges and passes, a great river—

"That river's the Usumacinta itself!" ejaculated Abbott. "The configuration is the same. Why, this is a picture-history of the first great Mayan migration!"

He realized the vast importance of his discovery. This long-buried vault was key to the greatest mystery of Mayan archaeology, the riddle of the people's origin.

Eagerly, holding the lantern high, Garth Abbott followed the story back around the walls. The painted migration marched back, up the Usumacinta and then northwestward between two ranges that he knew must be the Ollones and Chistango.

Its beginning was in a place represented as a long, straight valley at the foot of a square black mountain. Here was the representation of a city. And here the glyphs again spelled the magic name.

"Xibalba!" Abbott exclaimed. "The Mayan valley of the gods! Why, with this chart, I could *find* that valley!"

His excitement soared. On that painted chart, in the valley of fabled Xibalba, he perceived two curious dominating symbols.

One was the rearing, fiery plumed snake of the god Kukulcan. The other was the dark, bat-winged figure of Zotzilha, the Mayan lord of evil. Black bat and plumed

snake were pictured in deadly battle there in the valley!

Yanez had lifted the stone lid of the sarcophagus. "Senor, there is something in this stone coffin!"

Abbott's lantern spilled light into the coffin. There was dust in it, dust that had once been a man. But there was also the gleam of gold ornaments jewelled with jade.

A SWORD lay in the dust. It was a weapon of the most ancient Mayan pattern, a short, heavy copper sword edged with brilliant saw-teeth of green obsidian. The hilt was a miraculous carving of the plumed serpent, whose eyes were two big blazing emeralds.

Abbott eagerly picked the sword from the dust. "Whoever was buried here must have been a king, a great leader—"

He stiffened, his voice trailing off. For as his hand closed around the sword hilt, his senses suddenly swam from shock.

Power, tangible and tingling force, seemed rushing up into his arm and body from the ancient sword!

A roar like the thunder of waves dinned in Abbott's ears. He seemed encompassed by whirling mists, seemed to feel a vast and *alien* personality somehow seize upon his brain.

The mists abruptly darkened and before him flashed a face! A dark, smooth, handsome face with heavy-lidded eyes, which in spite of its unearthly beauty was somehow —hideous.

Repulsion, horror and a bitter hatred shook Abbott. Something in his mind, or in that alien mind that had weirdly gripped him, seemed to recognize that hovering face in the darkness.

"Zotzilha Chimalman!" Abbott heard a voice inside his brain flaring. "So you have watched, evil one?"

Silver-sweet, mocking laughter chimed from the handsome face before him. Its heavy-lidded eyes were taunting, malicious.

"Aye, I have watched for I knew that you would seek someday to return, Kukulcan. But it is too late now!"

"Not while I live!" Abbott heard that mental voice raging. "And I *do* live now, and soon I will—"

"Senor!"

Yanez' cry had such horror in it that it brought Garth Abbott back to awareness. He found that he had dropped the sword.

He looked a little dazedly around the low, lantern-lit tomb, and then at the Guatemalan's scared face.

"Senor, your face was strange," shivered Yanez. "It was like one of *those!*"

And he pointed at the fierce-faced warrior-priests pictured on the wall.

"I must have been dizzy, delirious, for a moment," stammered Abbott. "The air in this place is bad."

He was still quivering from the weirdness of that momentary delusion, but he forced it from his mind.

What the hell, Kukulcan and Zotzilha were mere phantoms, the forgotten gods of a people perished a thousand years ago! The influences of this place had been too much for his nerves, for a moment.

"Come on, Jose—we'll make our photographs and get out of here."

When they squirmed out of the vault a half-hour later, Abbott brought with him that strange sword.

Yanez looked wonderingly, almost fearfully, at him after they had replaced the block.

"And now, senor?"

Abbott's voice rang with excitement. "Now I've got a clue archaeologists have hunted for years—a clue to the lost heartland of the Mayas. We're going to charter a plane and search for Xibalba!"

But why was it, he wondered, that the name of the fabled valley was no longer golden and luring in his ears? Why was it that the very name of Xibalba was now somehow freighted with *dread?*

II

THE plane was a stout little two-place job which Abbott had chartered from an air-express line in Barrios. It manfully bucked the tricky currents which swirled low over these blue scarps and ranges of the vast hinterland.

Abbott had been a war pilot in the Pacific, and hunting out an objective in unknown terrain was nothing new to him. But after hours of quartering the tumbled

mountains northeast of the Usumacinta, he had to admit himself baffled.

"The valley I'm hunting should be right down there," he said impatiently, pointing. "But it just isn't."

Yanez looked skeptical. "The chart in that tomb was made a very long time ago."

"Mountains and valleys don't shift around," Abbott retorted. "It should be here. We'll circle around again."

He had carefully traced back the route designated by the pictured chart in the tomb—the route from Xibalba that had been followed by the Mayans of long ago. He had gone up beyond the Usumacinta, northeast between the Ollones and Chistango ranges, then on until he had spotted the stark, square black mountain of the pictures.

And the long, straight, narrow valley he sought should be somehow in sight south of that black mountain, but wasn't. There was nothing but a tumbled wilderness of blue peaks and green forest.

Yanez was obviously uneasy. This hinterland was nearly all Lacandone country, and those wild tribes weren't hospitable to fliers who make forced landings in their forests.

The Guatemalan presently uttered a warning. "The sky is getting queer."

Abbott abruptly realized that a strange change had come over the heavens. All around him the sky was growing strangely *dark*.

It was not the darkness of gathering clouds. It was as though the light of the sky was being conquered and submerged by a surging darkness from nowhere.

It was like the weird vibrant darkness that had momentarily enveloped his mind in his strange experience in the tomb!

"Better get out of here!" Abbott exclaimed, banking around sharply. "It's some queer freak of weather—"

Next moment, he realized their imminent danger. The unnatural gloom had deepened to such degree that he could barely make out the stupendous peaks that rose about them.

With a startled exclamation, Abbott opened the throttle. There was absolutely no wind, nothing but an unholy stillness in which the shadowy darkness gloomed and thickened.

He took a course to avoid the great square peak which he could no longer see. Then things happened swiftly.

A blinding flash of lightning seared across the heavens and revealed the black peak looming up just ahead of the plane!

Yanez yelled wildly, and Abbott jerked hard at the controls. The plane started to curve sharply about, but he had a sickening realization that he was too late to avoid crashing into the cliffs.

But a howling gust of storm-wind suddenly smote the little ship and flung it bodily back from the looming cliffs.

"Good God!" he cried, as he fought the controls. "If it hadn't been for that storm-gust—"

Thunder crashed to drown his voice. Sudden storm was unloosing its fury, spears of terrific lightning tearing the unnatural darkness to shreds, an inferno of winds raging around the little plane.

AGAIN and again, that strange darkness closed in and left Abbott flying blind amid those threatening peaks. And again and again the lightning of the thunderstorm ripped through the gloom.

Lightning that was like fiery serpents writhing across the heavens, struggled titanically with the black-winged darkness that strove to annihilate them! So seemed that infernal battle of the heavens to Abbott, as he hunched over the controls.

A thin wail of terror came from the Guatemalan as the plane sank sickeningly. "The storm carries us downward!"

Abbott saw the altimeter needle rushing back. The plane was helpless in the grip of the howling storm.

Again the fire-snakes uncoiled across the sky.

By their flare, Abbott glimpsed the earth below rushing wildly up at them.

Then he glimpsed something else—a long, straight black line that looked like a mere crack in the earth. It was a narrow canyon, of unguessable depth, invisible from ordinary altitudes.

"That's the valley below!" he yelled. "That long canyon must be Xibalba!"

"We fall!" yelled Yanez, eyes popping from his head.

Invisible giant hands of the thunder-

storm were dragging the laboring plane down toward that canyon, down *into* it!

"Bail out!" he yelled to the Guatemalan. "We're going to crash!"

He grabbed up his pack, scrambled to the cabin door. He pushed Yanez out ahead of him and then they were turning over and over in the air as they plunged downward.

Their parachutes puffed out.

As they fell amid lightning-torn wind and blackness and thunder, Abbott had dazed glimpses of lightning-illumined scenes below.

He glimpsed forests, gardens, the walls and terraces of a white stone city. Then with a ripping of silk, the parachute let him down through trees and brush. He felt a shock, and then knew nothing.

When he recovered consciousness, Yanez was bending anxiously over him. The Guatemalan's swarthy face was scratched, and looked wild.

"Senor, I feared you dead!" he stuttered. "This place—"

Abbott sat up. Awe and wonder fell upon him as he looked around.

There was no storm now. Quiet peace reigned here in a green forest of fairylike beauty. Tall ceibas, cedars and willows waved in the balmy breeze, in a curiously golden daylight.

Abbott looked up. The softened light fell from the crack of sky high above, the mouth of the canyon. Two miles above his head it yawned, and the canyon itself was only a mile in width.

"The merest crack in the surface of earth!" he marvelled. "No wonder it's never been spotted by any plane."

Sudden remembrance increased his excitement. "I saw a city as we fell! A city, here in Xibalba—"

Yanez gripped his arm. "There are men around us in the forest, senor. I have heard them gathering."

Abbott scrambled to his feet. As he did so, from the trees around them stepped a score of fantastic figures!

TO THE young archaeologist, it was as though the remote past had suddenly come to life. These were warriors of the ancient Maya!

Copper-red, fierce-eyed men, their garb and weapons matched the sculptures on the walls of Chichen Itza and Uxmal and Copan.

They wore wonderful headdresses of brilliant red and green feathers, built upon light wooden frameworks; short kirtles of jaguar skin and sandals of the same hide; belts of leather gemmed with jade and emerald. Their arms were spears and swords tipped with obsidian, like that ancient sword in his pack.

"Mayans, of the oldest period!" whispered Abbott, his brain rocking. "By Heaven, the fabled valley, the city—is *living!*"

Abbott felt a thrill only an archaeologist could understand. For years, scholars had dreamed of finding a lost, living remnant of the old Mayan civilization.

Many a search had been made, in vain. But the clue of the old tomb, and the thunderstorm that had swept them down into this hidden canyon, had brought him into the heart of such a survival.

Abbott spoke to the advancing warriors, in the Mayan tongue that has remained almost unchanged through the centuries.

"We are—friends! We come from above, from outside this valley!"

The warriors stopped, swords raised. Upon the fierce face of their magnificently attired captain came a look of incredulity.

"From outside? You are lying, stranger! No man could descend the walls!"

"It is truth!" Abbott persisted. "Thunderstorm swept us down here—"

The captain's face stiffened. "You say that thunderstorm brought you? That is strange—that is very strange."

Abbott could not understand what the other meant. He watched the play of doubt on that dark red face.

The captain finally spoke. "This matter is not for my judgment. I, Vipal, am but a captain in the guards of Ummax, the king. You will come with us to Xibalba for his judgment."

"This *is* Xibalba, then?" cried Abbott eagerly. "The valley of the gods, of Zotzilha and Kukulcan?"

His question had an amazing effect. The Mayan warriors seemed to start, and into Vipal's yellow eyes leaped a fierce light.

"What do *you* know of Kukulcan, strangers?" he cried menacingly.

Abbott sensed that he had somehow blundered badly. He should have known better than to start asking questions so soon.

"I meant no harm," he said earnestly. "I thought that Kukulcan, the Plumed Serpent, the lord of thunder, was the greatest of your gods."

"Repeat that blasphemy and you'll not live to reach Xibalba!" hissed Vipal. "Come!"

Abbott, wondering, picked up his pack. More and more, this whole experience seemed dreamlike to him.

Two thousand years might have rolled back for him, he thought. This buried valley hidden in the mountain-guarded wilderness lay untouched by time and change.

But if these Mayans held true to the ancient civilization, why had his mention of Kukulcan so enraged them? Kukulcan *had* been the most worshipped of the old gods in the Mayan cities of long ago, had been the thunder god, the enemy of dark Zotzilha and his evil powers.

Yanez trudged beside him, the tall, somber-eyed Mayan warriors marching on each side of them. Before they had gone far through the forest, they struck a broad trail that ran northward up the valley.

The forests were green and lovely. A small river flowed down the valley and the trail kept beside it. Looking up, Abbott glimpsed at the north end of the canyon the giant square black peak that blocked its end. Its frowning cliffs loomed stark and brutal.

He thought he could descry a massive flight of stairs leading up the cliff to the portaled entrance of a black-mouthed cavern.

"What is that cavern in the distant mountain?" he ventured to ask Vipal.

The captain looked at him stonily. "It is a place which I think you will soon see, stranger."

The menace in the answer was clear, if the meaning was not. Abbott felt more and more enmeshed in mystery and danger.

The trail led them past a giant, ancient stone pyramid-temple that rose in the forest. It looked crumbling, neglected, a terraced pyramid like the great temple at Chichen Itza.

Abbott glimpsed stone heads of gigantic plumed serpents rearing from its terraces, and realized it was the temple of Kukulcan. Why was it so neglected, forsaken, abandoned to the forest?

Then that riddle passed from his mind in a shock of wonder. The trail had emerged from the forest. Before them, beyond gardens and orchards, rose the fantastic white mass of the city Xibalba.

III

GOLDEN light of the dying day struck across the city. It was a mass of low, flat-roofed white stucco structures which were grouped around a central cluster of sculptured stone palaces and pyramidal shrines. Biggest of the palaces was a massive, oblong pile surrounded by porticoes of giant columns, rich with grotesque carving.

Toward that barbarically magnificent structure, Abbott and Yanez were led by their fierce-eyed guards. As they entered the paved streets, the American's fascinated eyes beheld a vista of ancient Mayan life such as he had never expected to witness.

Copper-skinned men and women of the lower class were here in great numbers, thronging to stare in wonder at the two strangers. Farmers, potters, weavers, all these were dressed both sexes alike in short kirtles that left their bodies bare above the waist. Here and there brilliant plumed captains and dark-robed priests stood out in the throng.

They crossed wonderful gardens and paved ball-courts to enter the massive palace. Abbott guessed that a runner had gone ahead of them, when they stepped into the long, torchlit main hall.

For Ummax the king sat upon his throne of carven wood awaiting them, and warriors, priests and women crowded the room.

"Now, how came you into Xibalba, strangers?" demanded the king of Abbott. "Long has entrance to our valley been blocked by the great landslides of long ago."

Ummax was a giant of a man, his huge limbs wrapped in magnificent jaguar skins

and jewelled leather trappings, the brilliant plumes of his fantastic headdress falling halfway to the floor. He sat with a massive black stone mace across his knees.

His dark red face was gross but stark in its strength, with brutality and cunning in his eyes as he glared at Abbott.

The captain Vipal spoke before Abbott could answer. "They say that they were brought down into the valley by thunderstorm."

A big warrior beside the throne, a grizzled, one-eyed, scarred-faced captain in white plumes, uttered a loud exclamation.

"By thunderstorm? And this stranger is fair of hair, as legend tells of—"

The king Ummax interrupted fiercely. "What you hint at is impossible, Huroc! The man is lying!"

A girl beyond the grizzled, scarred warrior spoke quietly. "The man cannot be lying when he has not yet spoken for himself."

Abbott looked at her in wonder and quick admiration. This Mayan princess was a figure of wild, barbaric loveliness.

Her slim copper body had for garment but a richly embroidered white linen kirtle, fringed with jade beads. Her soft shoulders and proud little breasts bare, her dark hair crowned by an elaborate headdress, her chiselled features and dark eyes had a compelling allure.

Ummax had turned on her furiously. "You, Shuima, are supporting Huroc in hinting blasphemy! I tell you to beware!"

Abbott found his voice. "I do not understand all this. It is true that storm brought me here, yet I was searching for this valley of Xibalba. I found a clue to its location in a tomb far away."

"A tomb?" mocked Ummax. "A tomb that led you to Xibalba? All lies!"

He raised his hand. "Vipal, you will take these two strangers to—"

"I'm telling the truth!" Abbott broke in desperately. And then he bethought himself of a half-proof he could show.

He stooped swiftly and tore open the pack he had dropped at his feet. From it, he drew that ancient, short, heavy sword.

"See, I found this sword in the tomb! And there was an inscription, telling—"

Abbott's voice trailed off. A strange and sudden change had come over every human being in the barbaric, torchlit hall.

Ummax, the big one-eyed captain Huroc, the girl Shuima—they and everyone else seemed stricken by a strange paralysis as they stared at the ancient, heavy weapon in Abbott's hand.

"The sword of Kukulcan!" whispered Huroc, his single eye wild, flaming with excitement. "Then the Plumed One after-all these ages has returned!"

Ummax bounded to his feet, towering gigantic, clutching his great black mace as he glared at Abbott.

"So it *was* the lord of thunder who brought you here!" he hissed.

And then, abruptly, Abbott saw a strange and awful change take place in Ummax's face.

It suddenly distorted into a wholly different face, into the handsome, heavy-lidded, evil countenance that Abbott had confronted in that strange vision in the tomb.

Darkness seemed to gloom and thicken in the torchlit hall! Unearthly darkness, something cold, alien, terrifying—

AND then swiftly the handsome, evil face was gone, and it was Ummax' own brutal, raging countenance that looked down at him.

Ummax seemed to struggle for control over himself before he spoke.

"Stranger, that sword is—known, here," he said finally. "Your tale may be true. At least, we welcome you as a guest until we can speak further of these things.

"Conduct them to fitting quarters," he told Vipal jerkily. And then he added fiercely, glaring around the awe-stricken throng, "And let no blasphemous talk of these things go abroad!"

Abbott, stunned and mystified, put the sword back into his pack and with Yanez followed the captain Vipal from the room.

The face of the tigerish Mayan warrior looked ashen in the torchlight of the sculptured corridors through which he led. He bowed low as he ushered them into a long, white-walled chamber.

"Food and drink will be brought you, lords," he said huskily, and withdrew.

Abbott looked wonderingly around the torch-illumined room. Brilliant feather

tapestries woven with familiar Mayan designs hung from the walls. Low stools of carven wood and bright woven mats were the only furniture. Small barred windows looked out into the night.

Quickly, serving-maids appeared with colorful pottery trays and bowls and flagons. The copper-skinned girls, fair bodies bare to the waist, looked with extreme awe at Abbott and Yanez as they set down their burdens.

One, bowing low before him, seized his hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Many in Xibalba have waited long for Kukulcan's return, lord!" she whispered.

Abbott stared after them when they had gone. "I'll be damned! Because of that sword and the thunderstorm, these people have identified me somehow with their god Kukulcan!"

"Gods of thunder and gods of evil—this place is unholy, accursed!" exclaimed Yanez, crossing himself.

The Guatemalan's swarthy face was pale, his hands shaking. Abbott slapped him reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Buck up, Jose. Just because they're superstitious is no reason why it should affect us."

"It is not just superstition, no!" said Yanez feverishly. "You saw that devil-king call hell's demons to him there in the throne-room! You saw his face, saw the darkness that gathered—"

"Hell, will you let a few grimaces and a chance shadow scare you?" Abbott demanded impatiently. "We've found a wonderful place, a place that will make us famous. Forget all this nonsense of gods and devils."

But later, after they had eaten and were stretched on soft mats in the darkened chamber, Abbott found it not easy to forget.

He lay, watching the flickering gleam of torchlight that came through the windows from somewhere outside the palace, and turning over and over in his mind the weird situation into which he had stumbled.

WHY had the chance identification of himself with Kukulcan roused in these people such deep and opposed emotions, of rage on the part of Ummax, of awe in others, of fervent hope in some? What *had* happened there in the throne-room when it had so strangely darkened?

Abbott did not realize that he had fallen into exhausted slumber until he suddenly awoke, alert and quivering. Then he heard a slight, stealthy sound.

A dark shadow was stealing toward him, bending over him. Instantly Abbott bounded upward and fiercely gripped the intruder.

He was thunderstruck to find himself gripping slim, soft naked shoulders, with perfumed hair against his face.

"Lord, it is I, Shuima!" whispered a throbbing voice. "Strike not for I am not your enemy!"

"Shuima? The princess in the throne-room?" whispered Abbott, stunned. "What the devil—"

A bigger, dark figure crossed the torchlight gleam from the window, and Yanez awoke to utter a startled squawk.

"Quiet your friend or all is lost!" warned Shuima swiftly. "It is Huroc, who has come with me on this mission."

Huroc? The grizzled one-eyed captain? Abbott felt more and more mystified but in a hasty whisper he silenced the Guatemalan.

Shuima's soft hand pulled him down to the floor beside the window. By the dim glimmer of light from outside, he could descry her chiselled face and the scarred mask of Huroc.

The girl was speaking quickly. "Lord, Huroc and I have come thus by secret stealth to your chamber, to warn you that at this very moment Ummax gathers the powers of the Bat-winged one against you!"

"The Bat-winged? You mean Zotzilha, your bat-god of darkness? Just what do you mean by that?" Abbott asked incredulously.

Huroc's deep voice throbbed. "Surely you know well. Have you not returned as we have long prayed you would, to crush that evil one? Is it not why you have come, lord Kukulcan?"

Abbott gasped. "You call *me* Kukulcan? This is all madness. I am no god."

"No, but you are the chosen of the god," Shuima said quickly. "You are the Holder

of Kukulcan, as Ummax is Holder of dark Zotzilha."

Abbott mentally damned all superstition. Before he could protest, the girl was rapidly whispering on.

"It is strange that you do not realize these things yourself! For Kukulcan brought you here, his thunders sweeping you down into our valley as you told. And Kukulcan will surely manifest himself in you, for the final struggle that even now impends."

"Struggle? With what? With whom?" Abbott wanted to know.

"With the Bat-winged!" Huroc growled fiercely, his huge figure shaking with hatred. "With the dark lord of evil who for generations has fed and fattened upon our helpless race!"

IV

SHUIMA'S soft fingers gripped Abbott's hand passionately as she whispered swiftly.

"Twenty centuries have passed since *both* Kukulcan and Zotzilha manifested themselves through living men in our valley. Zotzilha, the Bat-winged, to batten upon the life-force of the sacrifices offered him. But Kukulcan, the Plumed Serpent, to teach and help us!

"Kukulcan, though his Holder, blessed our people then. He drove the Bat-winged back into his lair in the black mountain, and he taught us ways of peace and happiness. Then, in a fateful day, the prince of Iltzlan who was then the Holder of Kukulcan led a tribe of our folk into the outer world when this valley became too small for our numbers.

"Iltzlan never returned! And the sword of Kukulcan by which a man could alone become Holder of the god, was lost with him in the outer world. So dark Zotzilha came forth from his lair and dominated our people, and since then has reigned in wickedness over them through such instruments as that Ummax who is now his Holder.

"But now you have come back with the sword, and now we know that Kukulcan means to manifest himself through you and to end the tyranny of the Bat-winged and his creatures in Xibalba forever!"

Abbott was appalled. The superstitious dualism of this lost people's faith had involved his own person.

His possession of that sword which he had taken from the tomb which he now knew was Iltzlan's, had made them think him a chosen instrument of their god Kukulcan.

"I know nothing of gods!" he protested. "By my people, Kukulcan is considered a mere myth."

"Kukulcan is no myth!" Huroc exclaimed. "He is force, invisible but tangible, real, mighty—aye, as Zotzilha is real and mighty. The Plumed Serpent is but the symbol of his lightnings. The *real* Kukulcan is not of this world."

It sounded almost convincing. But Abbott forced himself to dismiss superstition from his mind. He must keep his head clear.

"Just what do you expect me to do to unseat Ummax-Zotzilha's tyranny? You have some plan?"

Shuima's answer stunned him. "You go with us now to the neglected Temple of the Plumed Serpent. There have already gathered a host of those in Xibalba who still are secretly devoted to Kukulcan—like the two guards at your doorway who let us into your chamber.

"There in his temple, Kukulcan will manifest himself in you as his Holder. And when our people see that, they will follow you to the death against Ummax and his warriors!"

Abbott was appalled. They expected some kind of supernatural possession to manifest itself in him.

It was insane. Yet he had to fall in with the idea, to humor their belief, if he were not to be murdered in this palace-trap.

"All right, I'll go," he said quickly. "But remember that I claim none of the kinship with Kukulcan that you credit!"

He turned to the Guatemalan. "Yanez, it might be safer for you to get clear of this whole tangle once we're out of the palace. I don't want to drag you into further danger."

"I think there is danger everywhere in this valley tonight, senor," whispered Yanez. "And I go where you go."

Huroc opened the door, torchlight from

the corridor outside outlining his massive figure. He had a heavy sword in his hand.

"Let us be quick! And forget not the consecrated sword, lord Kukulcan!"

Abbott took the heavy, ancient sword from his pack and followed the huge one-eyed warrior and the slim girl into the hallway.

The two guards on duty outside it bowed to him with deep reverence. "We are of the faith, Lord Kukulcan!"

"Come! This way!" whispered Shuima.

They had taken but ten steps toward the angle of the corridor when there suddenly came around it the captain, Vipal.

The Mayan was not three feet in front of them, and his tigerish face stiffened as he struck with the drawn sword in his hand.

"I *guessed* there might be treachery!" he hissed, as the obsidian-edged blade drove at Abbott's heart.

With a low, warning cry, Yanez shoved Abbott violently aside. As Abbott reeled, he heard a choking gasp.

"Senor—"

HE REGAINED footing, whirled with the ancient sword uplifted. But in that brief moment, it was already over.

Big Huroc's giant arm had whipped around Vipal's throat. There was a dull, cracking sound, and the tigerish warrior went limp with eyes rolling horribly.

"Quieter that way!" panted the one-eyed giant.

"Lord, your friend is hurt!" exclaimed Shuima.

Yanez lay, clutching the ghastly wound made in his side by that swift, saw-toothed sword. His face drained of color.

He whispered a word to Abbott bending frantically over him. The word and his life ended together.

"Damn it, I brought the man to death!" choked Abbott. "He took that sword-blow meant for me—"

"Death is close for all of us unless we get out of the palace at once," warned Huroc. He swung to the two guards who had come racing along the corridor. "Hide these bodies! We go!"

Abbott's brain was whipped with grief, remorse, doubt, as he followed the giant and the girl hastily out of the palace.

Deep black brooded the night over Xibalba, only a thin scimitar of stars across the heavens marking the mouth of the canyon high overhead. He stumbled with his guides across gardens, along unlighted and deserted narrow streets of the low city.

The torchlit mass of the palace fell behind and presently they were in the forest and pressing along a narrow trail. Birds screamed in the dark trees as they passed, branches whipped their faces.

Huroc looked back and uttered a low exclamation. Abbott descried, far back at the north end of the valley, torches made tiny by distance coming down the stair in that massive mountain-cliff.

"Ummax returns from the Temple of the Bat-winged!" rasped the one-eyed giant. "He will miss you, and then—"

He did not finish, but quickened his pace, Shuima's hand on Abbott's arm urging him ever faster.

Then through the forest filtered red torchlight. There rose before them the looming white terraces of the great pyramidal Temple of the Plumed Serpent.

Men and women numbering many hundreds waited with flaring torches on the terraces, a tense and silent host. Many were warriors fully armed, and the eyes of all fastened on Abbott's face as he went between his two companions up the first massive stairway.

"The sword! It *is* Kukulcan's sword!" he heard them whisper excitedly as they glimpsed the ancient weapon he carried.

"The lord of thunder! The Plumed Serpent!" swelled the cry.

ABBOTT felt dazed when he reached the flat shrine atop the pyramid. Here reared two enormous stone effigies of the plumed snake, great bodies coiled, mighty heads challengingly upthrust. Between them was a stone chair around which their coils writhed protectingly.

He turned and looked down at the hosts on the torchlit terraces. A deep, taut silence had now fallen upon them, and their faces were like graven masks of utter expectation turned up to him.

"You must sit in the chair of the Holder, and grasp the sword while we make the invocation to Kukulcan," Huroc told him.

"Huroc! Shuima! This is all crazy!" Abbott protested. "What you expect cannot happen."

"We *know* that you are the chosen Holder or you would not have found the sword!" exclaimed Huroc. "Take your place! The invocation begins."

They were chanting, those hosts down on the terraces. Chanting words that were familiar to Abbott from the old inscriptions.

"Bright One, Lord of the Thunder,
Plumed Serpent of living lightning—"

Sitting there above them, gripping the ancient sword, Abbott heard a low roll of thunder up the canyon and groaned inwardly.

"They'll think it the answer to their invocation! And when nothing else happens—"

"Lord of the storm-swept sky—"

The thunder rolled louder as the chant swelled. And Abbott stiffened suddenly on his stone seat.

Force again was rushing up from the sword into his arm and body, as it had seemed to in the tomb. But now more powerfully, his whole body tingling and quivering from its impact!

"Electric influences of that coming storm," Abbott tried to tell himself, his throat dry.

The torchlit throng below seemed to dissolve in bright mists, the swell of the chant and the roll of thunder to merge into a steady roaring in his ears.

He whirled, spun, was engulfed by shining mist. And again, but more completely now, he felt the impact upon his brain of a mind cool, vast and alien.

"I am he whom these folk call Kukulcan. But I am no god."

He *heard* that cool, quiet voice, in the whirling mists. Yet it spoke inside his own brain!

"You live in a universe that has infinitely many dimensions unknown to you. In those dimensional abysses dwell entities such as you have not imagined, formless, bodiless, yet powerful. And some of them are—evil.

"Long ago, one of those evil ones escaped our watch and penetrated through to the dimension of your Earth. He laired in this valley, became worshipped and dreaded as the Bat-winged, as a god of evil, by these ignorant folk.

"I, whose fault allowed his escape, was sent to force him back into his own dark dimensional gulfs. But he had grown too strong! He has maintained himself here, feeding on the life-force of sacrifices and utilizing men as his instruments, for centuries.

"And for centuries I have been unable to interfere, because the sword you hold was lost by chance in the outer world. That sword is a cunningly contrived key which can open the way between dimensions and allow me to manifest myself through the man who holds it. Your finding it enabled me to use you as my instrument against the Bat-winged.

"He must be destroyed, now or never, lest he grow too great for this valley and reach dark arms out over your earth. The black mace of Ummax is the key by which *he* can reach into this world. You must secure and destroy that mace, at all costs!"

Crash of thunder shook the mists that shrouded Garth Abbott's mind, and suddenly those bright mists were fading.

He opened dazed eyes upon the faces and windblown torches beneath him, and saw awe in Huroc's burning eye and Shuima's face. He knew that his own face must have been strange, unhuman.

Down from the gathering storm smote lightning that seemed to dance upon the temple top and outline the great Plumed Serpents of stone beside him, like coiling snakes of living fire.

"Kukulcan!" roared the throng beneath, frantically acclaiming the dazed Abbott. "Kukulcan returns!"

Abbott, brain reeling from that weird mental possession that still seemed partly to grip him, found himself crying out.

"I *am* the Holder of the Plumed Serpent! Kukulcan returns in me! And I say that we march on Xibalba now, to pull down dark Zotzilha's tyranny forever!"

V

DELUSION, hallucination born of waking nightmare that the rush and strangeness of events had brought him? He could not wholly believe that, with that

supernal wrath and purpose still possessing his mind.

If an unearthly, evil thing *had* reached into earth from alien abysses, if he himself was really the human instrument by which it must be driven back, he must not linger now to doubt!

"Huroc, gather our warriors!" he cried. "We march back on the city at once."

"We're ready now!" shouted the giant. "Our one chance is to surprise Ummax and—"

Shrill wail from the forest interrupted him, and up onto the torchlit terraces of the temple staggered a Mayan warrior covered with blood and dust.

"The city's people have risen against Ummax!" he cried. "When the king returned from the Bat-winged's temple and gathered his guards to follow you here, the people rose for Kukulcan!"

"No chance of surprise now! It's started!" yelled Abbott. "Come on!"

Huroc and Shuima were beside him as his host poured through the forest in a torrent of torches and swords.

"The people can't stand long against Ummax' guards!" Huroc was shouting as they ran. "But with you to lead them, all things are possible!"

Thunder of the oncoming tempest rolled behind them as they burst out of the forest into sight of the city.

Xibalba writhed in the throes of battle! Wildly shaken torches revealed the clashing combat in its streets as Ummax' solid masses of guards cut through the seething mob of rebel citizens.

Abbott saw that the raging revolt wavered already on the brink of defeat, that the disciplined warriors were cutting swiftly through the wild mob.

"Slay all with arms in their hands!" roared Ummax' bull voice across the din. "Stamp out these traitors, once and for all!"

Abbott glimpsed the towering figure of the king, his wonderful plumes nodding above the heads of his guards as he brandished and struck with the great black mace that was his weapon.

That black mace was more than a weapon! In Abbott's fevered brain, as he charged beside Huroc, rang remembrance of that mental voice that had seemed to speak to him in the temple.

"The black mace of Ummax is the key by which Zotzilha can reach into this world. You must destroy it, at all costs!"

"Kukulcan! Kukulcan!" rose the wavering cry of the rebels, even as they fell back before the swords and spears of the guards.

"Kukulcan is *here!*" roared Huroc, as he and Abbott with their warriors crashed into the melee. "The Plumed Serpent leads us!"

At sight of Abbott's figure, of the heavy, ancient sword he carried, a thunderous shout roared from the mob. They surged forward in mad new charge.

Abbott felt himself carried as on the crest of a human wave against the solid ranks of Ummax' guards. Saw-edged swords and spears gleamed in the shaken torchlight before his eyes.

He struck blindly with his sword, felt it bite into flesh and bone. He glimpsed awe on the faces of Ummax' men as they fell back, a superstitious dread.

"We're breaking them!" shouted Huroc close beside him, the giant exultant. "On, Kukulcan!"

"Hold firm!" roared Ummax to his men. "The Bat-winged is with us. See!"

Ummax had raised his black mace high in the torchlight. A swift, subtle change was coming over the raging scene.

Cold, malefic darkness seemed rolling down in an awesome wave upon Abbott and Huroc and their advancing horde, smothering their torches, dazing and blinding them.

"The wings of our master fall upon them! Strike and spare not!" howled Ummax, exultant. "But take the false Kukulcan and the traitors Huroc and Shuima alive!"

Abbott felt the pulse of dismay, of dawning terror, through his forces as that chill, rolling darkness deepened over them.

They were giving back, crying aloud in fear! And he too felt a strange dread of that gathering gloom.

He told himself fiercely that he was letting superstition affect him, that it was only a blast of chill air from the storm rolling up the valley that was smothering the torches. And yet—

Ummax' guards were breaking among

his shaken forces, swords were striking fiercely at him now, Huroc fighting madly beside him.

"Shuima is taken, our men give way!" the giant cried hoarsely. "Lord Kukulcan, unless you lift the Bat-winged's darkness—"

Shuima captured? Ummax roaring in triumph as he urged his triumphant warriors on? Steady, wrathful anger that was *not* his own mind's rage seemed to possess Abbott's brain fully now.

"Fear not!" he heard himself shouting. "Zotzilha's dark forces cannot stand against *these!*"

And he flung his hand to point skyward, at blinding lightning uncoiling and searing through the chill darkness.

THE hellish crash of thunder that followed those first lightnings of the breaking storm was punctuated by Huroc's cry.

"The fire-serpents of Kukulcan strike across the sky! The lord of thunder leads us!"

And as the full fury of the tempest crashed upon Xibalba, the warriors behind Abbott surged resistlessly forward.

"Kukulcan leads us!" shrilled the wild, exultant cry.

To Abbot, that battle in the storm-lashed streets became a mad chaos of swords and shouts and ghastly faces, of blinding lightning flaring in battle against sullen darkness.

Battle of gods as well as men? Or not of gods, but of entities from far beyond Earth's dimensions now in death-grapple here?

He could not speculate upon that now. He had but one objective in his mind, and that was to cut his way to Ummax and seize that mighty black mace which the towering king wielded.

But Ummax disappeared from view as the battle lost form and changed into a staggering, swirling melee. His guards were being split up, attacked in groups, overwhelmed by weight of raging numbers.

Abbott found Huroc grasping his arm, leaning to shout to him above the roll of thunder and hiss of rain.

"We've won the city! It's the end of Ummax' tyranny!"

"Not the end until he is dead and his black weapon in my hands!" cried Abbott. "Quick, to the palace! We must find him!"

Wolfishly-shouting, battle-fevered men poured after them over the last remnants of resistance to the massive palace.

In the torchlit corridors of the great pile they found no one but scared servants who gave them news of Ummax.

"The king and his last warriors fled past here to the Temple of the Bat-winged! They had the princess Shuima with them!"

Huroc uttered a hoarse exclamation. "We must catch them before they enter Zotzilha's dark cavern! For no man but Ummax himself can enter the Bat-winged's lair!"

Abbott whirled. "Quick, then! We can't wait for the others!"

With the hundred men who had followed them into the palace, he and Huroc plunged out into the tempest and hastened northward up the valley.

VI

ABBOTT could have imagined no spectacle of such awesome grandeur as the thunderstorm that was moving with them up the great canyon. Confined between those lofty rock walls, its thunders were deafening and each lightning-flash appeared to rive the universe.

Wind and rain were wildly rocking the forest along whose trails they pressed. They had no torches and only by light of the recurrent flashes could they finally make out the black, looming bulk of the square mountain that headed the valley.

"See, they climb the stairs to the Bat-winged's temple!" yelled Huroc, pointing with his sword. "After them!"

"We follow, Kukulcan!" cried the maddened Mayan warriors behind them.

By the lightning-flashes, Abbott saw the stair as a great flight of broad steps cut from the black living rock and leading right up the steep slope of the mountain.

Black stone statues of bat-winged Zotzilha guarded the landing halfway up the stair, and here Ummax' two-score guards had turned desperately with raised swords.

"They seek to hold us while Ummax escapes with Shuima into the Bat-winged's lair!" raged Huroc.

Abbott, by a blinding flash, himself saw Ummax climbing on up the stair and dragging the senseless form of the Mayan girl.

"Crush them down! See, Kukulcan's lightnings assault the evil one's lair!" Huroc encouraged.

The flashes of incessant lightning were indeed striking the face of the black mountain, riving away great masses of rock.

Reason told Abbott that metallic ores in the mountain must be attracting the lightning. But the stunning spectacle seemed to transcend such logic by its supernatural power.

Swords clashed and rang across the stair as they reached the landing and Ummax' guards. Abbott, staggering on the slippery wet stone, ducked one vicious blow and hacked at the distorted face beyond.

The lightning showed six men already cut down when the rest of Ummax' men, unnerved by the appalling flashes, gave up.

"Spare our lives, Kukulcan!" they cried, dropping their weapons. "The king forced us to stand against you!"

"Take them prisoner!" Abbott cried to his shouting warriors. "Now up the stair, Huroc!"

They raced with a score of their men up the last flight of massive steps. The whole mountain seemed rocking and quivering to the continuous lightning-blasts as they reached the top landing.

This broad stone platform was a mere shelf cut in the side of the cliff. From it, a high, dark tunnel ran into the solid rock of the mountain. And over that dark portal spread the stone wings of Zotzilha, guarding, warding the lair within.

Abbott gripped his sword and started into the dark passage, and Huroc and the others hesitantly started to follow him.

They stepped into a deep darkness that was utterly cold. A freezing chill smote to Abbott's bones, a feeling of iciness and suffocation as the sullen darkness in the tunnel swiftly thickened.

"The Bat-winged's power is upon us!" choked Huroc. "I cannot move!"

He and the other Mayans seemed actually petrified, either by superstitious terror or by the malign grip of that icy darkness.

But though Abbott himself felt the smothering grasp of the frigid gloom, he was still able to struggle forward along the somber tunnel.

Flash on flash of lightning sent a momentary blinding glare down the passageway ahead of him, and for that moment he found himself able to pitch forward at increased speed.

"Kukulcan goes to slay the Bat-winged in his lair!" he heard Huroc shouting, behind him.

Abbott felt himself two utterly divergent beings as he pressed unsteadily forward through those gloomy cavern tunnels, sword gripped in his hand.

He was Garth Abbott, American and archaeologist, seeking to save the girl Shuima from the brutal savage tyrant who had dragged her here with murderous purpose.

But he was also the unearthly being who was using him as instrument, he was also that bright being from other-world dimensions whose century-old struggle with a thing of evil had now reached climax.

"Zotzilha, I come!" he seemed to hear himself shouting fiercely down the tunnels. "Will you meet me, spawn of darkness?"

The part of him that was Garth Abbott rejected that fierce challenge as mere mental aberration born of the influence of storm and battle on his fevered mind.

But the part of him that was Kukulcan drove him forward with raging eagerness against the rolling, turbid darkness.

THE tunnel debouched into a mighty cavern. And here darkness seemed enthroned and supreme, a swirling blackness as of extra-terrestrial abysses that blinded and staggered Abbott.

Hoarse, bellowing laughter like banterings in hell broke echoing around Abbott as he swayed irresolute.

"So you came to meet me, Kukulcan? Then be it so!" it mocked.

A titan thunderclap rocked the mountain as bright lightning flashed from outside along the tunnels into this buried cavern.

The throbbing flare of fiery radiance for a moment illumined the whole interior of the cavernous space to Abbott's eyes.

He saw, across the cavern, the gigantic, looming stone image of a huge bat with outspread wings, whose red jewel-eyes

glared down at him and at whose feet Shuima's slim body lay unmoving.

And he saw also Ummax towering beside him, black mace already raised to dash down upon his head!

The lightning-flash died—and Abbott whirled away and heard the whistle of the mace as it grazed past him in falling.

Wrapped again in the suffocating cold darkness, Abbott lunged and stabbed with his sword—but stabbed empty air.

"This darkness is *my* realm!" mocked Ummax' voice. "You cannot escape—"

The lightning flared in the tunnels again, and in time to show Abbott that the towering Mayan was charging him.

Abbott struck savagely before the flare should fade, and felt his sword bite into his antagonist's shoulder. But the whirling mace struck his head a glancing blow, this time.

He staggered, felt himself falling, heard Ummax' hoarse shout of triumph. Desperately, as he fell, Abbott caught at the Mayan's legs and brought him down before he could swing the mace again.

They grappled on the rock floor of the cavern, Ummax ferociously choking him into helplessness. And the dancing flares of lightning that were now continuous in the outer tunnels showed Abbott the distorted face of Unmax as the supreme horror.

For it was the handsome, evil *alien* face he had twice before glimpsed that now had usurped Ummax' features.

Face of Zotzilha glaring down at him from the human body it used as instrument? Was his own face in this terrible moment the countenance of Garth Abbott or of Kukulcan?

His shaken senses were fading as Ummax' great hands throttled him. The towering Mayan leaped up, snatching up the black mace to bring it down on Abbott in a final death-blow.

Ummax' wounded shoulder checked him for a moment, forced him to shift his grip upon the mace. And in that moment, with desperate upsurge of last strength, Abbott bounded up and whirled his sword and struck.

He felt the sword crash *through* the uplifted mace, shattering it to fragments! He felt it tear deep into the towering Mayan's breast!

"Beaten, driven, by the Bright One!" howled Ummax as he staggered. "Forever exiled—"

THUNDER rocked the mountain wildly, and the fiery serpents of lightning in the tunnels showed Abbott that as Ummax fell it was the Mayan's own gross face that now was stiffening in death.

And Abbott felt, at the same moment, release from the strange tension of possession that had seemed to grip him all this night.

Gone dark Zotzilha, forced back into the black abysses from which he had long ago crept into earth? And gone too Kukulcan, his mission finished?

Abbott heard the grind and roll of shifting rock, and by the fading flare his dazed eyes saw the giant bat-winged image rocking forward on its base.

He sprang unsteadily and snatched Shuima's slim figure aside as the statue raised of old by Zotzilha's worshipers ponderously leaned and fell and crashed to ruin.

"The Bat-winged!" choked the Mayan girl fearfully when he had carried her into the outer tunnel, and had revived her.

"It has perished, and there is no more to fear," he told her hoarsely.

Shuima clung to him, quivering. "Ummax would have sacrificed me to it, as he has sacrificed many others. Yes, for ages, dark Zotzilha has drunk the life of victims in that dread cavern."

Had it been so? Had, for centuries, some dark and alien being from beyond fed upon the life-force of men and women in monstrous vampirism? Or was that only superstition masking brutal murder?

"You have set Xibalba free from that horror, Lord Kukulcan!"

"Kukulcan no more," he told her. "Whatever I was tonight, possessed or mad, I am so no longer."

Possession or momentary madness? He would never know which, for certain. He might come more and more to believe that only the influence of time and place and superstition had given him those queer delusions of having been an instrument in a struggle transcending earth.

But, remembering the strange chain of

fate that had brought him from a chance-found tomb to lead the fight against evil tyranny of this lost, forgotten race, he would never be too sure!

He walked unsteadily with Shuima out through the tunnels to the stone landing, and stood there with her in the flare of the dying storm as he faced the frantic acclaim of Huroc and his warriors.

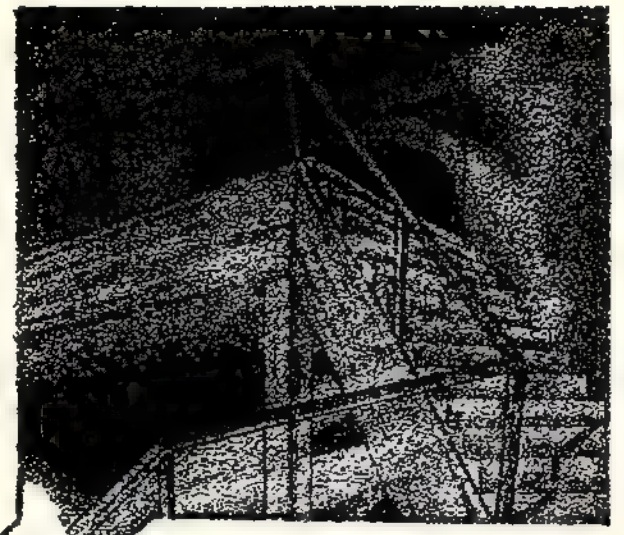
"The Plumed Serpent is victor! Hail the Holder of Kukulcan, the new lord of Xibalba!"

Abbott knew then that whatever had brought him to Xibalba, he would stay here. He could bring these people the best of the outside world, could in time reveal them to that world.

But all that lay in future years. For now, standing with his arm tightening around Shuima, he was content.

The Haunted Stairs

BY YETZA GILLESPIE



THE staircase narrow as the way
Unto salvation's door,
Leads from a hall as dark as sin
With deep stains on the floor.

Nobody knows who climbed halfway
To where the turn is black,
What clutching fingers waited there,
Who felt the heartstrings crack.

And no one knows what now ascends
The thirteenth step—and stops,
And flutters like a netted bird
Before it moans, and drops. . . .

I'll step into the hall some night
When I forget my prayers,
And to my sorrow, see what stands
Upon the dreadful stairs.

Superstitions and Taboos
By Weill

WHEN THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS SACRIFICED A BULL, THEY INVOKED UPON ITS HEAD ALL THE **EVILS** THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BEFALL THEMSELVES AND THE LAND OF EGYPT!

IT IS BELIEVED THAT A LIGHTED CANDLE IN THE ROOM DURING THE TIME OF APPEARANCE OF A **GHOST** WILL BURN A BRILLIANT **BLUE** COLOR!

9

THE NUMBER **NINE** WAS THOUGHT TO POSSESS A MYSTIC POWER AND WAS USED BY PRIMITIVE PEOPLE BOTH TO **CAUSE** AND TO **CURE ILLNESS**!

DARKENING OF THE EYELIDS WAS ORIGINALLY DONE AS A CHARM AGAINST THE **EVIL EYE.** IT WAS BELIEVED TO PROTECT ONE AGAINST THE DARTS THAT WERE SHOT FROM THE EYES OF OTHERS AND AS A GUARD TO PREVENT CASTING THE BANEFUL EMANATIONS **ONESELF**!

Midnight

By JACK SNOW

BETWEEN the hour of eleven and midnight John Ware made ready to perform the ceremony that would climax the years of homage he had paid to the dark powers of evil. Tonight he would become a part of that essence of dread that roams the night hours. At the last stroke of midnight his consciousness would leave his body and unite with that which shuns the light and is all depravity and evil. Then he would roam the world with this midnight elemental and for one hour savor all the evil that this alien being is capable of inspiring in human souls.

John Ware had lived so long among the shadows of evil that his mind had become tainted, and through the channel of his thoughts his soul had been corrupted by the poison of the dark powers with which he consorted.

There was scarcely a forbidden book of shocking ceremonies and nameless teach-

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

. . . and at the stroke of twelve he would climax the years of homage he had paid to the dark powers of evil

ings that Ware had not consulted and pored over in the long hours of the night. When certain guarded books he desired were unobtainable, he had shown no hesitation in stealing them. Nor had Ware stopped with mere reading and studying these books. He had descended to the ultimate depths and put into practice the ceremonies, rites and black sorceries that stained the pages of the volumes. Often those practices had required human blood and human lives, and here again Ware had not hesitated. He had long ago lost account of the number of innocent persons who had mysteriously vanished from the face of the earth—victims of his insatiable craving for knowledge of the evil that dwells in the dark, furtively, when the powers of light are at their nadir.

John Ware had traveled to all the strange and little known parts of the earth. He had tricked and wormed secrets out of priests and dignitaries of ancient cults and religions of whose existence the world of clean daylight has no inkling. Africa, the West Indies, Tibet, China, Ware knew them all and they held no secret whose knowledge he had not violated.

By devious means Ware had secured admission to certain private institutions and homes behind whose facades were confined individuals who were not mad in the outright sense of the everyday definition of the word, but who, if given their freedom, would loose nightmare horror on the world. Some of these prisoners were so curiously shaped and formed that they had been hidden away since childhood. In a number of instances their vocal organs were so alien that the sounds they uttered could not be considered human. Nevertheless, John Ware had been heard to converse with them.

IN JOHN WARE'S chamber stood an ancient clock, tall as a human being, and abhorently fashioned from age-yellowed ivory. Its head was that of a woman in an advanced state of dissolution. Around the skull, from which shreds of ivory flesh hung, were Roman numerals, marked by two death's head beetles, which, engineered by intricate machinery in the clock, crawled slowly around the perimeter of the skull to mark the hours. Nor did this clock tick as does an ordinary clock. Deep within its woman's bosom sounded a dull, regular thud, disturbingly similar to the beating of a human heart.

The malevolent creation of an unknown sorcerer of the dim past, this eerie clock had been the property of a succession of warlocks, alchemists, wizards, Satanists and like devotees of forbidden arts, each of whom had invested the clock with something of his own evil existence, so that a dark and revolting nimbus hung about it and it seemed to exude a loathesome animus from its repellantly human form.

It was to this clock that John Ware addressed himself at the first stroke of midnight. The clock did not announce the hour in the fashion of other clocks. During the hour its ticking sounded faint and dull, scarcely distinguishable above ordinary sounds. But at each hour the ticking rose to a muffled thud, sounding like a human heart-beat heard through a stethoscope. With these ominous thuds it marked the hours, seeming to intimate that each beat of the human heart narrows that much more the span of mortal life.

Now the clock sounded the midnight hour, "Thud, thud, thud—" Before it stood John Ware, his body traced with cabalistic markings in a black pigment which he had prepared according to an ancient and noxious formula.

As the clock thudded out the midnight hour, John Ware repeated an incantation, which, had it not been for his devouring passion for evil, would have caused even him to shudder at the mere sounds of the contorted vowels. To his mouthing of the unhuman phrases, he performed a pattern of motions with his body and limbs which was an unearthly grotesquerie of a dance.

"Thud, thud, thud—" the beat sounded for the twelfth time and then subsided to a dull, muffled murmur which was barely audible in the silence of the chamber. The body of John Ware sank to the thick rug and lay motionless. The spirit was gone from it. At the last stroke of the hour of midnight it had fled.

With a great thrill of exultation, John Ware found himself outside in the night. He had succeeded! That which he had summoned had accepted him! Now for the

next hour he would feast to his fill on unholy evil. Ware was conscious that he was not alone as he moved effortlessly through the night air. He was accompanied by a being which he perceived only as an amorphous darkness, a darkness that was deeper and more absolute than the inky night, a darkness that was a vacuum or blank in the color spectrum.

WARE found himself plunging suddenly earthward. The walls of a building flashed past him and an instant later he was in a sumptuously furnished living room, where stood a man and a woman. Ware felt a strong bond between himself and the woman. Her thoughts were his, he felt as she did. A wave of terror was enveloping him, flowing to him from the woman, for the man standing before her held a revolver in his hand. He was about to pull the trigger. John Ware lived through an agony of fear in those few moments that the helpless woman cringed before the man. Then a shapeless darkness settled over the man. His eyes glazed dully. Like an automaton he pressed the trigger and the bullet crashed into the woman's heart. John Ware died as she died.

Once again Ware was soaring through the night, the black being close at his side. He was shaken by the experience. What could it mean? How had he come to be identified so closely with the tortured consciousness of the murdered woman?

Again Ware felt himself plummeting earthward. This time he was in a musty cellar in the depths of a vast city's tenement section. A man lay chained to a crude, wooden table. Over him stood two creatures of loathesome and sadistic countenance. Then John Ware *was* the man on the table. He knew, he thought, he felt everything that the captive felt. He saw a black shadow settle over the two evil-looking men. Their eyes glazed, their lips parted slightly as saliva drooled from them. The men made use of an assortment of crude instruments, knives, scalpels, pincers and barbed hooks, in a manner which in ten short minutes reduced the helpless body before them from a screaming human being to a whimpering, senseless thing covered with wounds and rivulets of blood. John Ware suffered as the victim suffered. At last the tortured one slipped into unconsciousness. An instant later John Ware was moving swiftly through the night sky. At his side was the black being.

It had been terrible. Ware had endured agony that he had not believed the human body was capable of suffering. Why? Why had he been chained to the consciousness of the man on the torture table? Swiftly Ware and his companion soared through the night moving ever westward.

John Ware felt himself descending again. He caught a fleeting glimpse of a lonely farm house, with a single lamp glowing in one window. Then he was in an old fashioned country living room. In a wheel chair an aged man sat dozing. At his side, near the window, stood a table on which burned an oil lamp. A dark shape hovered over the sleeping man. Shuddering in his slumber, the man flung out one arm, restlessly. It struck the oil lamp, sending it crashing to the floor, where it shattered and a pool of flame sprang up instantly. The aged cripple awoke with a cry, and made an effort to wheel his chair from the flames. But it was too late. Already the carpet and floor were burning and now the man's clothing and the robe that covered his legs were afire. Instinctively the victim threw up his arms to shield his face. Then he screamed piercingly, again and again. John Ware felt everything that the old man felt. He suffered the inexpressible agony of being consumed alive by flames. Then he was outside in the night. Far below and behind him the house burned like a torch in the distance. Ware glanced fearfully at the shadow that accompanied him as they sped on at tremendous speed, ever westward.

ONCE again Ware felt himself hurtling down through the night. Where to this time? What unspeakable torment was he to endure now? All was dark about him. He glimpsed no city or abode as he flashed to earth. About him was only silence and darkness. Then like a wave engulfing his spirit, came a torrent of fear and dread. He was striving to push something upward. Panic thoughts consumed him. He would not die—he wanted to live—he would escape! He writhed and twisted in his narrow

confines, his fists beating on the surface above him. It did not yield. John Ware knew that he was linked with the consciousness of a man who had been prematurely buried. Soon the victim's fists were dripping with blood as he ineffectually clawed and pounded at the lid of the coffin. As time is measured it didn't last long. The exertions of the doomed man caused him quickly to exhaust the small amount of air in the coffin and he soon smothered to death. John Ware experienced that, too. But the final obliterating and crushing of the hope that burned in the man's bosom probably was the worst of all.

Ware was again soaring through the night. His soul shuddered as he grasped the final, unmistakable significance of the night's experiences. *He, he* was to be the victim, the sufferer, throughout this long hour of midnight!

He had thought that by accompanying the dark being around the earth, he would share in the savoring of all the evils that flourish in the midnight hour. He *was* participating —but not as he had expected. Instead, *he* was the victim, the cringing, tormented one. Perhaps this dark being he had summoned was jealous of its pleasures, or perhaps it derived an additional intensity of satisfaction by adding John Ware's consciousness to those of its victims.

Ware was descending again. There was no resisting the force that flung him earthward.

He was completely helpless before the power he had summoned. What now? What new terror would he experience.

On and on, ever westward through the night, John Ware endured horror after horror. He died again and again, each time in a more fearsome manner. He was subjected to revolting tortures and torments as he was linked with victim after victim. He knew the frightful nightmare of human minds tottering on the abyss of madness. All that is black and unholy and is visited upon mankind he experienced as he roamed the earth with the midnight being.

Would it never end? Only the thought that these sixty minutes must pass sustained him. But it did not end. It seemed an eternity had gone by. Such suffering could not be crowded into a single hour. It must be days since he had left his body.

Days, nights, sixty minutes, one hour? John Ware was struck with a realization of terrific impact. It seemed to be communicated to him from the dark being at his side. Horribly clear did that being make the simple truth. John Ware was lost. Weeks, even months, might have passed since he had left his body. Time, for him, had stopped still.

John Ware was eternally chained to the amorphous black shape, and was doomed to exist thus horribly forever, suffering endless and revolting madness, torture and death through eternity. He had stepped into that band of time known as midnight, and was caught, trapped hopelessly—doomed to move with the grain of time endlessly around the earth.

For as long as the earth spins beneath the sun, one side of it is always dark and in that darkness midnight dwells forever.

Three in Chains

BY SEABURY QUINN

THE murmur of voices sounded from the drawing room as I let myself in wearily after a hard afternoon at the hospital. An intern might appreciate two appendectomies and an accouchement within the space of four hours, but an intern would need the practice and be thirty years my junior. I was dog-tired and in no mood to entertain visitors. As silently as I could I crept down the hall, but:

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin hailed as I passed the partly opened door on tiptoe, "*à moi, s'il vous plait.* This is of interest, this." Putting the best face I could upon the matter I joined him.

"May I present Monsieur and Madame Jaquay?" he asked, then with a bow to the callers, "*Monsieur, Madame,* Dr. Trowbridge."

The young man who stepped forward with extended hand had fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, a broad, low forehead and deep greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath straight brows. The woman seated on the sofa was in every way his feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap her short-cropped black hair, combed straight back from her forehead and waved in little ripples, lay against her small well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to seem almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry. The dead-white pallor of her skin was enhanced by her lack of rouge and the brilliant lipstick on her mouth, while the greenness of her hazel eyes was rendered more noticeable by skillfully applied eye shadow which gave her lids a faintly violet-green tinge and a luster like that of worn silk.

I shook hands with the young man and bowed to the girl—she was little more—then looked at them again in wonder. "Mr. and Mrs. Jaquay?" I asked. "You look more like—"

"Of course, we do," the girl cut in. "We're twins."

"Twins—"

"Practically, sir. Our mothers were first cousins, and our fathers were first cousins, too, though not related to our mothers, except by marriage. We were born in the same hospital within less than half an hour of each other, and grew up in adjoining houses. We went to school, high school and college together, and were married the day after graduation."

"Is it not entirely charming?" Jules de Grandin demanded.

I was becoming somewhat nettled. Tired as I was I had no wish to interview two-headed calves, Siamese twins, cousins married to each other and like as grains of sand on the seashore or other natural phenomena. "Why, yes, of course," I agreed, "but—"

"But there is more—*parbleu,* much more! —my old and rare," the little Frenchman assured me. To the young man he ordered: "Tell him what you have told me, *mon jeune. Mordieu,* but you shall see his eyes pop like those of an astonished toad-frog!"

I dropped into a chair and tried my best to assume a look of polite interest as young Jaquay ran his hand over his sleek hair, cast a look of appeal at de Grandin and began hesitantly. "Georgine and I came here three months ago. Our Uncle, Yancy Molloy, made us sole beneficiaries of his will and Tofte House—perhaps you know the place?—was part of our inheritance. There were a few repairs to be made, though the place was in extraordinarily good condition for so old a structure, and we've been living there a little over two months. We've become very much attached to it; we'd hate to have to leave."

"Then why not stay?" I answered somewhat ungraciously. "If the house is yours and you like it—"

"Because it's haunted, sir."

"What!"

He colored slightly, but went on: "It's

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

"—as if that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into some hellish drain-pipe."

haunted. We didn't notice anything out of the ordinary for the first few days we lived there, then gradually both Georgine and I began to—well, sir, to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library or sitting at table, or just going about our affairs in the house when suddenly we'd have that strange, uncanny feeling you have when someone stares fixedly at the back of your neck.

"When we'd turn suddenly as we always did at first, there'd be no one there, of course, but that odd, eerie sensation of being constantly and covetly watched persisted. Instead of wearing off it grew stronger and stronger till we could hardly bear it."

"U'm?" I commented, taking quick stock of our callers, noting their small stature, their delicacy of form and feature . . . their double cousinship amounted almost to inbreeding, fertile ground for neuroses to sprout in. "I know that feeling of malaise you refer to, and the fact that you both experienced it seems diagnostic. You young folks of today burn the candle at both ends. There's no need to hurry so; save a few sensations to be probed when you're past forty. These visual, sensory and circulatory symptoms aren't at all unusual. You'll have to take it easier, get much more rest and a lot more sleep. If you can't sleep I'll give you some trional—"

"But certainly," de Grandin cut in. "And the trional will surely stop the sound of clanking chains and dismal, hollow groans."

"What?" I turned on him. "Are you trying to tell me—"

"Not at all, by no means, my old one. But Monsieur Jaquay was endeavoring to do so when you interrupted with your prattle of the so odious trional. Say on, *Monsieur*," he ordered our guest.

"We were getting pretty much on edge from this feeling of being watched so constantly," young Jaquay continued, "but it wasn't till last week we heard anything. We've made some pleasant friends in Harrisonville, sir, and been going out quite a bit. Last Saturday we'd been to New York on a party with Steve and Mollie Tenbroeck and Tom and Jennie Chaplin—dinner at the Wedgewood Room, to Broadway to see 'Up in Central Park,' then to Copacabana for supper and dancing. It must have been a little after three when we got home.

"GEORGINE had gone to bed, and I was in the bathroom washing my teeth when I heard her scream. I ran into the bedroom with the dentrifice suds still on my lips, and there she was, huddled in the bed with the covers drawn up to her chin, pushing against the headboard as if she were trying to force herself through it. 'Something touched me!' she chattered. 'It was like an ice-cold hand!'

"Well—" he smiled apologetically—"you know how it is, sir. 'What?' I asked.

"'I don't know. I was almost asleep when it put its clammy fingers on me!'

"We'd had several rounds of cocktails at both dinner and supper, and Burgundy with dinner and champagne at supper, but both of us were cold sober—well, not more than pleasantly exhilarated—when we got home. 'You're nuts,' I told her.

"And just as I spoke something went wrong with the lights. They didn't go out all at once. That could have been explained by a blown-out fuse or a short circut in the feed line. This was different. The lamps began to grow dim slowly, as if a rheostat were being turned off. It was possibly a half-minute before the room was dark, but when the darkness came it was terrific. It pressed down on us like a great blanket, then it seemed to smother us completely—more completely than a thousand black cloths. You know that wild, unreasoning feeling of panic you have when you choke at table? This was like it. I was not only blinded, but bound and gagged as well. I tried to call to Georgine. The best that I could do was utter a choked, strangling gasp. I tried to go to her; it was like trying to wade waist-deep through a strong tide. The blackness in that room seemed liquefied, almost solidified.

"Then we heard it. At first it was no more than a whisper, like the sighing of a storm heard miles away, but getting louder, stronger, every second, like a storm that rushes toward you. Then the sigh changed to a moan and the moan became a howl, and the howl rose to a screech, and then rose to a piercing shriek that stabbed our eardrums like a needle. It rose and rose,

spiraling upward till it seemed no human throat could stand the strain of it. Then it stopped suddenly with a deep, guttural gurgle, as if all that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into a drain-pipe. The silence that followed was almost worse than the noise. It was as if we had suddenly been stricken stone-deaf.

"I could feel the perspiration trickling down my forehead and into my eyes, but the sweat seemed turned to ice as the silence was smashed by the clanking of a chain. At first it was no more than a light clinking sound, as if some tethered beast stirred in the darkness. But like the shriek it increased in volume till it seemed some chained monster were straining at his iron leash, striving with a strength past anything that man or beast knows to break loose from its fetters."

Jaquay halted in his narrative to draw a handkerchief from his breast pocket and pass it over his brow. His wife was sobbing on the sofa, not violently, but with soft, sad little sounds, like those a frightened child might make.

"And then, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin prompted.

"Then the lights flashed on, not slowly, as they had gone off, but with a sudden blaze of blinding brightness, and there we were in our bedroom and everything was just the same. Georgine was cowering against the headboard of the bedstead, and I was standing at the bathroom door blinking like a fool in the sharp, dazzling light, with the dentifrice suds still on my lips and running down my chin to dribble on the floor."

"And there have been more—manifestations?"

GEORGINE JAQUAY answered in her charmingly modulated contralto. "Not so—so violent, sir. George and I were pretty badly shaken by what happened Saturday night, or more precisely Sunday morning, but we were both very tired and dropped off to sleep before we realized it. Next day was bright and sunny and we'd almost succeeded in convincing ourselves the experience of the night before was nothing but a sort of double nightmare when that sensation of being watched became stronger than ever. Only now it seemed somehow different."

"Hein?"

"Yes, sir. As if whoever—or whatever—watched us were gloating. Our uneasiness increased as the afternoon wore on; by bedtime we were in a pretty sorry state, but—"

"Ah, but you had the hardihood, the courage, *n'est-ce-pas, Madame?* You did not let it drive you from your home?"

"We did not," Georgine Jaquay's small mouth snapped shut like a miniature steel trap on the denial. "We hadn't any idea what it was that wanted to get rid of us, but we determined to face up to it."

"Bravissimo! And then?"

"I don't know how long we'd been sleeping. Perhaps an hour; perhaps only a few minutes, but suddenly I wakened and sat bolt-upright, completely conscious. I had a feeling of sharp apprehension, as if an invisible alarm-bell were sounding a warning in my brain. There was no moon, but a little light came through the bedroom windows, enough for me to distinguish the furniture. Everything seemed as usual, then all at once I noticed the door. It showed against the further wall in a dark oblong. Dark. Dark like a hole. Somehow the comparison made me breathe faster. I could feel the pulses racing in my wrists and throat. The door had been shut—and locked—when we went to bed. Now it swung open, and I had a feeling unseen eyes were staring at me from the hallway while mine sought helplessly to pierce the darkness. Then I heard it. Not loud this time, but a sort of whimpering little moan, such as a sick child might give, and then the feeble clanking of a chain, as if whatever were bound by it moved a little, but not much.

"I sat there staring helplessly into the dark while every nerve in my body seemed tauted to the breaking point, and listened to that hopeless moaning and the gentle clanking of that chain for what seemed like an hour. Then, very softly, came a woman's voice."

"A woman's, *Madame?*"

"Yes, sir. I could not possibly have been mistaken. It was low, not a whisper, but very weak and—hopeless."

"Yes, *Madame?* And what did this so small voice say, if you please?"

" 'My poor darling!' "

"Sang du diable! It said that?"

"Yes, sir. Just that. No more."

"And were there further voices?"

"No, sir. There were a few weak, feeble moans, repeated at longer and longer intervals, and every once in a while the chain would rattle, but there were no more words."

DE GRANDIN turned to young Jaquay. "And did you hear this so strange voice also, *Monsieur?*"

"No, sir. I slept through it all, but later in the night, perhaps just before morning, I wakened with a feeling someone stood beside the bed and watched me, and then I heard the scraping of a chain—not across our floor, but over something hard and gritty, like stone or perhaps concrete, and three people moaning softly."

"Three? *Grand Dieu des cochons,* the man says three! How could you tell, *Monsieur?*"

"Their voices were distinct and different. One was a man's, a light baritone, well-pitched, but very weak. The other two were women's, one soft and husky, like stroked velvet, a Negro woman's, I'm sure, and the other was lighter in tone, musical, but very feeble, like that of a person sinking in a swoon."

"They did not speak?"

"Not in words, sir, but from their tones I knew all three were very weak and exhausted, so far gone that it seemed nothing mattered to them."

"U'm?" de Grandin took his little pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "And what did you do next, *Monsieur?*"

Jaquay looked embarrassed. "We sent for Dr. Van Artsdalen, sir."

"Ah? And who is he, if one may inquire?"

"He's pastor of the Union Church at Harbordale, sir. We told him everything that had happened, and he agreed to exorcise the house."

"*Mordieu,* did you, indeed?" de Grandin twisted the waxed ends of his small blond mustache until they were as sharp as twin needles. "And did he succeed in his mission?"

"I'm afraid he didn't, sir. He read a portion of the Scriptures from St. Luke, where it says that power was given the Disciples to cast out devils, and offered up a prayer, but—we haven't had a moment's peace since, sir."

The little Frenchman nodded. "One understands all too well, *Monsieur.* The occultism, he is neither good nor safe for amateurs to dabble in. This Doctor—the gentleman with the so funny name—may be an excellent preacher, but I fear he was out of his element when he undertook to rid your premises of unwelcome tenants. Who, by example, told him they were devils he came out to drive away?"

"Why—er—" Jaquay's face reddened—"I don't think anybody did, sir. We told him only what we had experienced, and he assured us that evil is always subject to good, and could not stand against the power of—"

"One understands completely," de Grandin cut in sharply. "The reverend gentleman is also doubtless one of those who believe savage animals cannot stand the gaze of the human eye, that sharks must turn upon their back to bite, and that you are immune from lightning-stroke if you have rubber heels upon your shoes. In fine, one gathers he is one of those who is not ignorant because of what he does not know, but because of the things he knows which are not true. What has occurred since his visit?"

"All day we feel those unseen eyes fairly boring into us; at night the sighs and groans and chain-clankings begin almost as soon as darkness comes and keeps up till sunrise. Frankly, sir, we're afraid to stay in the place after sunset."

The Frenchman nodded approval. "I think that you are wise to absent yourselves, *Monsieur.* For you to stay in that house after dark would not be courageous, it would be the valor of ignorance, and that, *parbleu,* is not so good. No, not at all.

"Attend me, if you please: I have made a study of such matters. To 'cast out devils,' may be an act of Christian faith which anyone possessing virtue may perform. Me, I do not know. But I do know from long experience that what will be effective in one case will wholly fail in another. Do you know surely what it is that haunts this

house from which you have so wisely fled? Did the good *pasteur* know? Do I know? *Non, pardieu,* we grope in ignorance, all of us! We know not what it is we have to contend with. Attend me, *Monsieur,* if you please, with great carefulness. As that very learned writer, Manly Wade Wellman, has observed, there are many sorts of disembodied beings.

'In earth and sky and sea
Strange things there be.'

"There are, by example, certain things called elementals. These never were in human form; they have existed from the beginning, and, I assure you, they are very naughty. They are definitely unfriendly to humankind; they are mischievous, they are wicked. They should be given as wide a berth as possible. It is safer to walk unarmed through a jungle infested with blood-hungry tigers than to frequent spots where they are known to be, unless you are well-armed with occult weapons, and even then your chances are no better than those of the hunter who goes out to trail the strong and savage beast.

"Then there are those things we call ghosts. They cannot be defined with nicety, but as a class they are the immortal, or at least the surviving spiritual part of that which was once man or woman. These may be either good, indifferent or bad. The bad, of course, far outnumber the good, for the great bulk of humanity that has died has not been good. *Alors,* it behooves us to step carefully when we have dealings with them. You comprehend?

"*Bien.* It may well be the good *pasteur* used the wrong technique when he assumed to rid you of your so unwelcome cotenants. He did not surely know his adversary; it is entirely possible that he succeeded only in annoying him as one might irritate but not cripple a lion by shooting him with a light rifle. *Mais oui,* it may be so. Let us now proceed with system. Let us make a reconnaissance, spy out the land, acquaint ourselves with that with which we must match forces.

"When this is done we shall proceed to business, not before. No, certainly; by no means."

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he asked at breakfast next morning, "what do you know of this house from which Monsieur and Madame Jaquay have been driven?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," I answered. "I know it's more than a hundred years old and was built by Jacob Tofte whose family settled in New Jersey shortly after the Dutch wrested it from the Swedes in 1655."

"U'm? It is the original structure?"

"As far as I know. They built for permanence, those old Dutchmen. I've never been inside it, but I'm told its stone walls are two feet think."

"You do not know the year in which it was erected?"

"About 1800, I believe. It must have been before 1804, for there were originally slave quarters on the back lot, and slavery was abolished in New Jersey in that year."

"*Morbleu, pas possible!*"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing of the consequence, my friend. I did but entertain an idle thought. Those ghostly sighs and groans, those ghostly clankings of the chains, might not they have some connection with slavery?"

"None that I can see."

"And none, *hèlas,* that leaps to my eye, either," he admitted with a smile as he rose. "I did but toy with the suggestion." He lit a cigarette and turned toward the wall. "Expect me when I return, *mon vieux.* I have much ground to cover, and may be late for dinner—may *le bon Dieu* grant otherwise."

The evening meal was long since over when he returned, but that his day's work had not been fruitless I knew by the twinkle in his little round blue eyes, and his first words confirmed my diagnosis. "My friend, I would not go so far as to say I have found the key to this mystery, but I damnation think that I can say under which doormat the key hides."

I motioned toward the decanter and cigars, a work of supererogation, for he was already pouring himself a generous drink of brandy. "*Bien oui,*" he nodded solemnly as he shot the soda hissing into his glass. "All morning I did search, and nowhere could I find a person who knew much about that execrable Tofte House

until I reached the County Historical Society's archives. There I found more than ample reward for my labors. There were old deeds, old, yellowed newspapers; even the diaries of old inhabitants. Yes.

"This Jacob Tofte, he who built that house, must have been the devil of a fellow. In youth he followed the sea—*eh bien,* who shall say how far he followed it, or into what dark paths it led him? Those were the days of sailing ships, my old and rare, a man set forth upon a voyage newmarried and easily might find himself the father of a five-year-old when he returned. But not our friend old Jacob. Not he! He traveled many times to Europe, more than once to China and the Indies, and finally to Africa. There he found his true vocation. Yes."

He paused, eyes gleaming, and it would have been cruel to have withheld the question he so obviously expected. "Did he become a 'blackbirder,' a slaver?" I asked.

"*Parbleu, my* friend, you have put your finger on the pulse," he nodded. "A slave trader he became, *vraiment,* and probably a very good one, which means he must have been a very bad man, cruel and ruthless, utterly heartless. *Tiens,* the wicked old one prospered, as the wicked have a way of doing in this far from perfect world. When he was somewhere between forty-five and fifty years of age he returned to New Jersey very well supplied with money, retired from his gruesome trade and became a solid citizen of the community. Anon he built himself a house as solid as himself and married.

"Now here—" he leveled a slim forefinger at me like a pointed weapon—"occurs that which affords me the small inkling of a clue. The girl he married was his cousin, Marise Tenbrocken. She was but half his age and had been affianced to her cousin Merthou Van Brundt, a young man of her own age and the cousin, rather more distantly, of Monsieur Jacob. One cannot say with certainty if she broke her engagement willingly or at parental insistence. One knows only that Monsieur Jacob was wealthy while young Monsieur Merthou was very poor and had his way to make in the world. Such things happened in the old days as in the present, my friend."

HE PAUSED a moment, took a sip of brandy and soda, and lighted a cigar. "Of these things I am sure," he recommenced at length. "From there on one finds only scattered bones and it is hard to reconstruct the skeleton, much more so to hang flesh upon the frame. Divorce was not as common in those days as now, nor did people wash domestic soiled linen in public. We cannot surely know if this marriage of May and October was a happy union. At any rate the old *Monsieur* seems to have found domestic life a trifle dull after so many years of adventure, so in 1803 we find him fitting out a small schooner to go to New Orleans. *Madame* his wife remained at home. So did her *ci-devant fiancé,* who had found employment, if not consolation, in the offices of Peter Tandy, a ship chandler.

"Again I have but surmise to guide me. Did the almost-whitened embers of old love spring into ardent flame once more when Monsieur Van Brundt and Madame Tofte found themselves free from the surveillance of the lady's husband, or had they carried on a *liaison* beneath old Monsieur Jacob's nose? One wonders.

"*En tout cas,* Monsieur Jacob returned all unexpectedly from his projected voyage to New Orleans, dropping anchor in the Bay but three weeks after he had left. With Monsieur Tofte's arrival we find Madame Marise and her cousin, formerly her *fiancé,* and doubtless now her lover, vanishing completely. *Pouf!* Like that."

"And what became of them?" I asked as he remained silent.

"*Qui drait?* The devil knows, not I. They disappeared, they vanished, they evaporated; they were lost to view. With them perhaps went one Celeste, a Martinique mulatress Monsieur Jacob had bought —or perhaps stolen—to be Madame Marise's waiting maid.

"Her disappearance seemed to cause him more concern than that of *Madame* his wife and his young cousin Merthou, for he advertised for her by handbill, offering a reward of fifty dollars for her return. She was, it seems, a valuable property, speaking French, Spanish and English, understanding needlework and cooking and the niceties of the toilette. One would think he

would have offered more for her, but probably he was a very thrifty man. At any rate, it does not appear she was ever apprehended."

"And what became of Jacob Tofte?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "He sleeps, one hopes peacefully, in the churchyard of St. Chrysostom's. There was a family mausoleum on his land, but when he died in 1835 he left directions for his burial in St. Chrysostom's, and devised five thousand dollars to the parish. *Tiens,* he was a puzzle, that one. His very tombstone presents an enigma."

"How's that?"

"I viewed it in the churchyard today. Besides his name and vital data it bears this bit of doggerel:

'Beneath this stone lies J. Tofte,
The last of five fine brothers.
He died more happy by his lone
And sleeps more sound than others.'

"What do you make from that, *hein?*"

"Humph. Except that it's more generous in its substitution of adjectives for adverbs than most epitaphs, I'd say it compares favorably with the general level of graveyard poetry."

"Perhaps," he agreed doubtfully, "but me, I am puzzled. 'He died more happy,' says the epitaph. More happy than whom? And than whom does he sleep more soundly? Who are these mysterious others he refers to?"

"I can't imagine. Can you?"

"I—think—" he answered, speaking slowly, eyes narrowed, "I—think—I—can, my friend.

"I have searched the title to that property, beginning with Monsieur Jacob's tenancy. It has changed hands a surprising number of times. Monsieur Molloy, from whom Monsieur and Madame Jaquay inherited, was the fiftieth owner of the house. He acquired it in 1930 at an absurdly small price, and went to much expense to modernize it, yet lived in it less than a year. There followed a succession of lessees, none of whom remained long in possession. For the past ten years the place was vacant. Does light begin to percolate?"

I shook my head and he smiled rather bleakly. "I feared as much. No matter. Tomorrow is another day, and perhaps we shall be all wiser then."

"YOU have no office hours today, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked me shortly after breakfast the next morning.

"No, this is my Sabbatical," I answered. "One or two routine calls, and then—"

"Then you can come to Tofte House with us," he interrupted with a smile. "I damn think we shall see some things there today."

George and Georgine Jaquay were waiting for us at the Berkeley-York where they had taken temporary residence, and once more I was struck by their amazing likeness to each other. George wore gray flannels and a black Homburg, a shirt of white broadcloth and a pearl-gray cravat; Georgine wore a small black hat, a gray flannel manishly-cut suit with a white blouse and a little mauve tie at her throat. They were almost exactly of a size, and their faces similar as two coins stamped from the same die. The wonder of it was, I thought, that they required words to communicate with each other.

The gentleman with them I took to be their lawyer. He was about fifty, carefully if somberly dressed in a formally-cut dark suit with white edging marking the V of his waistcoat. His tortoise-shell glasses were attached to a black ribbon and in one gray-gloved hand he held a black derby and a black malacca cane.

"This is Monsieur Peteros, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin introduced when we had exchanged greetings with the Jaquays. "He is a very eminent medium who has kindly agreed to assist us."

Despite myself I raised my brows. The man might have been an attorney, a banker or mill-owner. Certainly he was the last one I should have picked as a practitioner of the rather malodorous profession of spiritualistic medium. Perhaps my face showed more than I realized, for Mr. Peteros' thin lips compressed more tightly and he acknowledged the introduction with a frigid "How d'ye do?"

But if the atmosphere were chilly de Grandin seemed entirely unaware of it. "Come, *mes amis,*" he bade, "we are assem-

bled and the time for action has arrived. Let us go all soon and not delay one little minute. No, certainly not."

FRAMED by birch and oak, elm and maple, the big old house in Andover Road looked out upon a stretch of well-kept lawn. It was built of native bluestone without porches, and stood foursquare to the highway. Its walls were at least two feet thick, its windows high and narrow, its great front door a slab of massive oak. The sort of house a man who had been in the slave trade might have put up, a veritable fortress, capable of withstanding attacks with anything less than artillery.

Jaquay produced his key and fitted it into the incongruously modern lock of the old door, swung back the white-enameled panels and stood aside for us to enter. Mr. Peteros went first with me close at his elbow, and as I stepped across the sill I all but collided with him. He had come to an abrupt halt, his head thrown back, nostrils quivering like those of an apprehensive animal. There was a nervous tic in his left cheek, the corners of his mouth were twitching. "Don't you sense it?" he asked in a voice that grated grittily in his throat.

Involuntarily I inhaled deeply. "No," I replied shortly. The only thing I "sensed" was the Charbert perfume Georgine Jaquay used so lavishly. I had no very high opinion of mediums. If Peteros thought he could set the stage to put us in a mood for any "revelations" he might later make, he'd have to try something more subtle.

We stood in a wide, long hall, evidently stretching to the rear of the house, stone-floored and walled with rough-cast plaster. The ceiling was of beamed oak and its great timbers seemed to have been hand-squared. The furniture was rather sparse, being for the most part heavy maple, oak or hickory —benches, tables and a few rush-bottomed square-framed chairs, and though it had small beauty it had value, for the newest piece there must have been at least a hundred years old. A fireplace stretched a full eight feet across the wall to the right, and on the bluestone slab that served for mantel were ranged pewter plates and tankards and a piece or two of old Dutch delft any one of which would have fetched its weight in gold from a knowing antique dealer. To our left a narrow stairway with a handrail of wrought brass and iron curved upward.

I was about to remark on the patent antiquity of the place when de Grandin's sharp command forestalled me: "It was in the bedroom you had your so strange experiences, my friends. Let us go there to see if Monsieur Peteros can pick up any influences."

Young Jaquay led the way, and we trooped up the narrow stairway single file, but halfway up I paused and grasped the balustrade. I had gone suddenly dizzy and felt chilled to the bone, yet it was not an ordinary chill. Rather, it seemed a sudden coldness started at my fingertips and shivered up into my shoulders, then, as with a cramp induced by a galvanic battery, every nerve in my body began to tingle and contract.

Just behind me, Peteros grasped my elbow, steadying me. "Swallow," he commanded in a sharp whisper. "Swallow hard and take a deep breath." As I obeyed the tingling feeling of paralysis left me and I heard him chuckle softly. "I see you felt it, too," he murmured. "Probably you felt it worse than I did; you weren't prepared for it." I nodded, feeling rather foolish.

Apparently the Jaquays had refurnished the bedroom, for it had none of the gloomy eighteenth century air of the rest of the house. The bedstead was a canopied four-poster, either Adam or a good reproduction, a tall chest of mahogany stood against one wall, between the narrow, high-set windows was a draped dressing table in the long mirror of which were reflected silver toilet articles and crystal bottles. Curtains of fluted organdie, dainty and crisp, hung at the windows. The floor was covered with an Abusson carpet.

"Bien." De Grandin took command as we entered the chamber. "Will you sit there, *Madame?*" he indicated a chintz-covered chair for Georgine. "And you, Monsieur Jaquay, I would suggest you sit beside her. You may be under nervous strain. To have a loving hand to hold may prove of helpfulness. *Mais oui,* do not I know? I shall say yes. You, Friend Trowbridge, will sit here, if you please, and Monsieur Peteros will occupy this chair—" he indicated a

large armchair with high, tufted back. "Me, I prefer to stand. Is all in readiness?"

"I think we'd better close the curtains," Peteros replied. "I seem to get the emanations better in the dusk."

"Bien. Mais certainement." The little Frenchman drew the brocade over-draperies of the windows, leaving us in semi-darkness.

Mr. Peteros leant back and took a silver pencil from his waistcoat pocket. Holding it upright before his face, he fixed his eyes upon its tip. A minute passed, two minutes; three. From the hall below came the ponderous, pompous ticking of the great clock, small noises from the highway—the rumble of great cargo trucks, the yelp of motor horns—came to us through the closed and curtained windows. Peteros continued staring fixedly at the pencil point, and in the semi-darkness his face was indistinct as a blurred photograph. Then the upright pencil wavered from the perpendicular. Slowly, like a reversed pendulum, or the arm of a metronome, it swung in a short arc from right to left and back again. His eyes followed it, converging on each other until it seemed he made a silly grimace. The silver rod paused in its course, wavered like a tree caught in a sudden wind, and dropped with a soft thud to the carpet. The medium's head fell back against the cushions of his chair, his eyelids drooped and in a moment came the sound of measured breathing, only slightly stertorous, scarcely more noticeable than the ticking of the clock downstairs. I knit my brows and shook my head in annoyance. I could have simulated a more convincing trance. If he thought we could be imposed upon by such a palpable bit of trickery. . . .

"O-o-o-oh!" Georgine Jaquay exclaimed softly. She had raised one hand to her throat and the painted nails of her outspread fingers were like a collar of garnets on the white flesh.

I felt a sudden tenseness. Issuing from Peteros' lips was a thin column of smoke, as if he had inhaled deeply from a cigar. Yet it was not ordinary smoke. It had an oddly luminous quality, as if its particles were microscopic opals that glowed with their own inward fire, and instead of coming in a series of short puffs, as cigar smoke would have come from his mouth, it flowed in steady, even stream, like steam escaping from a simmering kettle. *"Regardez, s'il vous plait,* Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered half belligerently. "I tell you it is psychoplasm—soul stuff!"

THE cloud of luminescent vapor drifted slowly toward the ceiling, then as if wafted by an unfelt zephyr coiled and circled toward the wall pierced by the curtained windows, and slowly, more like dripping water than a cloud of steam or smoke, began to trickle down the wall until it covered it completely.

It is difficult to describe what happened next. Slowly in the opalescent vapor that obscured the wall there seemed to generate small sparks of bluish light, mere tiny points of phosphorescence, and gradually, but with a gathering speed, they multiplied until they floated like a swarm of dancing midgets circling round each other till they joined to form small nebulae of brightness large as gleaming cigarette ends. The nebulae became more numerous, touched each other, coalesced as readily as rain drops brought together, till they formed a barrier of eerie, intense bluish light.

There was eeriness, uncanniness about it, but it was not terrifying. Instead of fear I felt a sort of gentle melancholy. Vague, long-forgotten memories wafted through my mind . . . a girl's soft laugh, the touch of a warm hand, the echo of the muted whisper of a once-loved voice, the subtle fragrance of old hopes and aspirations.

Half dazzled, wholly mystified by the phenomenon, I watched the luminous curtain.

A sort of cloudiness appeared in its bright depths, at first no more than a dim, unformed network of small dots and dashes, but gradually they built up a pattern. As when an image appears on the copper of a halftone plate in its acid bath, a picture took form on the surface of the glowing curtain. As if through the proscenium of a theatre—or on a motion picture screen—we looked into another room.

I recognized it instantly, so did Georgine Jaquay, for I heard her gasp, "Why, it's the hall of this house!"

"Taisez-vous!" de Grandin snapped.

"Laissez-moi tranquille, s'il vous plait, Madame! Be silent!"

It was the hall we had come through less than ten minutes before, yet somehow it was not the same. A great fire blazed on the wrought-metal andirons and in a pair of brass candlesticks tallow dips were burning. The lights and shadows shifted constantly, but such illumination as there was seemed to do little more than stain the darkness. The door through which we had come opened and a middle-aged Negro dressed in a suit of coarse tow came into the apartment, bending almost double under the weight of a brass-bound trunk of sole leather. He paused uncertainly a moment, seemed to turn as if to hear some command shouted at him from outside, then shambled toward the stairway.

The door, which had swung partly shut, was kicked back violently, and across the sill a man stepped with a woman in his arms. He was a big man, tall and heavy-set, with enormous shoulders and great depth of chest, dressed in the fashion of a hundred years and more ago. His suit of heavy woolen stuff was snuff-colored, made with a long coat and breeches reaching to his knees, and his brown stockings were of knitted wool but little better than those of the Negro. I guessed his age as somewhere near fifty, for there were streaks of gray in the long hair that he wore plaited in a queue and in the short dark reddish beard and mustache that masked his lower face. He had a big nose, dark hawk-eyes, broad low forehead and high-jutting cheek-bones. His skin was darkly tanned, and though he had few wrinkles they were deep ones. He was, I thought, a well-to-do farmer, perhaps a merchant sea captain. Certainly he was no gentleman, and just as certainly he was a hard customer, tricky and unscrupulous in bargaining and fierce and ruthless in a fight.

Of the woman we could see little, for a long hooded cloak of dark blue linsey-woolsey covered her from head to heels. What was at once apparent, however, was that she did not snuggle in his arms. She neither held his shoulders nor put her arms about his neck, merely lay quiescent in his grasp as if she rested after an exhausting ordeal, or realized the futility of struggling.

But when he set her on her feet we saw that she was very delicately made, not tall but seeming taller than her actual height because of extreme slenderness. She was pretty, almost beautiful, with a soft cream-and-carnation skin, bronze hair that positively flamed in the firelight, and eyes of luminous greenish violet with the wondering expression of a hurt child.

The man said something to her and with a start I realized we witnessed a pantomime, a scene of vibrant life and action soundless as an old-time moving picture, but legible in meaning as sky-writing on a windless day. We saw her shake her small head in negation, then as he echoed his peremptory demand hold out her hands in a gesture of entreaty. Her face was bloodless and her eyes suffused with tears, but if she had been a bird and he a cat her appeal could not have been more futile. Abruptly he seized her left hand and raised it to a level with her eyes, and on its third finger we saw the great, heavy plain gold band that marked her as a matron. For a moment he stood thus, then flung the little hand from him as if it were a bit of dross and grasped the trembling girl in his arms, crushed her to him and bruised her shrinking lips with kisses that betrayed no trace of love but were afire with blazing passion.

When he released her she shrank back, cheeks aflame with outraged blood and eyes almost filmy with nausea, but as he repeated his command she crept rather than walked to the stairway and mounted it slowly, holding fast to the wrought-brass handrail for support.

THE man turned toward the kitchen, bellowing an order and into the hall stole another girl about the age of her whom he had just mauled so lustfully. She was a mulatress, scarce larger than a child, with delicately formed features, short wavy brown hair clustering round her ears and neck in tiny ringlets, and large dark eyes as gentle—and as frightened—as a gazelle's. Despite the almost shapeless gown of woolen stuff that hung on her we saw her figure was exquisite, with high breasts, narrow hips and lean, small waist. She bore a straw-wrapped stone demijohn stopped with a broken corncob, and at his order

took a pewter tankard from the mantel and poured some of the colorless contents of her jar into it. "More!" We could not hear the word, but it required no skill in lip-reading to know what he ordered, and with a shrug that was no more than a flutter of her shapely shoulders she splashed an added half-pint of liquor into the beaker.

It was obvious she was afraid of him, for she stayed as far away as she could, and her large eyes watched him furtively. When she had filled the mug she stood back quickly, pretending to be busy with recorking the bottle, but obviously eager to stay out of reach.

Her stratagem was futile, for when he downed the draft he wiped his mouth upon his cuff and held out his hand. "Kiss it!" we saw, rather than heard him order. She took his rough paw in her delicate gold hands and bent her sleek head over it, but he would not let her kiss its back. "Not that way!" he bade roughly, and obediently she turned it over and pressed her lips to its palm.

Why he demanded this peculiar form of homage I had no idea, but evidently de Grandin understood its implication, for I heard him mutter, *"Sale bête*—dirty beast!"

The bearded man threw back his head and laughed a laugh that must have filled the house with its bellow, then half playfully but wholly viciously he struck the girl across the face with a back-handed blow that sent her reeling to a fall beside the tiled hearth of the fireplace. The demijohn slipped from her hand, and in a moment a dark stain of moisture spread across the stones.

We saw him beckon her imperiously, saw her rise trembling to her feet and slink toward him, her wide eyes fearful, her lips trembling. Nearer she crept, shaking her head from side to side, begging mutely for mercy, and when she was within arm's length he seized her as a pouncing beast might grasp its prey. As a terrier might shake a rat he shook her, swaying her slim shoulders till her head bobbed giddily and her short curls waved like wind-whipped bunting round her ears. Protesting helplessly she opened her mouth and the force with which he shook her drove her teeth together on her tongue so that a little stream of blood came from the corners of her mouth. Then, not content with this punishment, he struck her with his fist, knocking her to the floor, then raising her again that he might strike her down once more. Three times he hit her with his knotted fist, and every blow drew blood. When he was done he left her in a little crumpled heap beside the hearthstone, her slim gold hands held to her face and bright blood dripping from her nose, her lips and her bruised cheeks.

"Cochon, pourceau, sale chameau!" de Grandin whispered venomously. *"Pardieu*, he was a species of a stinking swine, that one!"

The big man wiped his mouth upon his sleeve once more and, swaying slightly from the effect of the potent apple-jack, made for the stairway up which the girl he had borne into the house had crept.

THE picture before us began to fade, not growing dimmer but apparently dissolving like a cloud of steam before a current of air, and in a moment little dots and lines of color danced and moved across the luminous screen, forming figures like the prisms of a kaleidoscope, then gradually merging to depict another scene.

Not very different from its present aspect, save that its lawn was not so well kept, the front yard of the house spread before us. It was early evening, and from the marshes—long since filled in and built over—rose a soft, light mist, silvery, unearthly, utterly still. The trees that rimmed the highway were almost denuded of their foliage and stood out in sharp silhouette, pointing to the pale sky from which most of the stars had been wiped by a half-moon's light. An earlier wind had blown the fallen leaves across the bricked walk with its low box borders, and the man and woman walking away from us kicked them from their path, rustling them against their feet as children love to do in autumn. At the lower end of the footway they paused and as the girl turned her face up to her escort we recognized the young woman we had seen borne into the house. The moonlight brought them into clear-cut definition. The man was young, about the girl's age, and bore a strong resemblance to her, obviously a family likeness. His clothes and

linen were threadbare but scrupulously clean, and his lean drawn face showed the effect of high ambition and slender resources. What they said we had no way of knowing, but we saw her arms creep up around his neck, not passionately, but tenderly, like the tendrils of a vine, as she raised her lips for his kiss. A moment they stood thus in silent embrace, then she unclasped her arms from his neck and he turned away, walking down the moonlit highroad with no backward glance and with squared shoulders, like a man who has made final, immutable decision.

ONCE more the scene was obscured, then took on new form, and we saw the white girl and the mulatress working feverishly packing a small nail-studded trunk. They folded linen underwear and sprinkled it with crumbled dry lavender, pressed a woolen dress down on the antique lingerie, added several pairs of cotton stockings and a pair of square-toed little buckled shoes. The box was packed and strapped, the girl ran to the door, but paused upon the threshold, the joy wiped from her face as sunlight disappears before a sudden cloud.

In the entrance stood the bearded man, and over one shoulder, as a butcher might have held a new-slaughtered calf, he bore the body of the young man we had seen before. Blood trickling from a scalp-wound told us how the boy had been bludgeoned, and on the barrel of the antique horse-pistol in the big man's right hand there was a smear of blood to which a few brown hairs adhered.

There was something utterly appalling in the big man's quietness. Methodically as if he followed a rehearsed plan he dropped the unconscious man on the bed, retraced his steps to the door and returned with three short lengths of iron chain which he proceeded to fasten round the necks of the two women and the swooning man.

Amazingly the women made no effort to resist but stood as dumbly and quiescently as well-trained horses waiting to be harnessed as he latched the fetters on their throats. Perhaps the memory of past beatings told them that submissiveness was wiser, perhaps they realized the hopelessness of entreaty or effort. It was very quickly accomplished, and in a moment the big man had shouldered the unconscious youth again, tucked the little trunk beneath his free arm, and nodded toward the door. Without a word of protest or entreaty the women went before him, holding the free ends of their neck chains in their hands as if to still their clinking.

WE LOOKED into a little room, perhaps some twelve feet square, stone-floored, stone-walled, stone-ceilinged. It was darker than a moonless midnight, but somehow we could distinguish objects. About the walls were small partitioned spaces rising four deep, tier on tier, like oversized pigeonholes, and each was closed with a stone slab in which a heavy ring-bolt had been set. Something like a swarm of small red ants seemed crawling up the backs of my knees and my spine. One did not need to be an antiquarian to recognize the crypts of an old family tomb.

Something stirred in the darkness, and as I strained my eyes toward it I saw the huddled form of a woman. I knew it for a woman by the long red hair that hung upon its head, but otherwise, although it had been stripped of clothing, it was almost unclassifiable. Emaciation was so far advanced that she was little more than a mummy. Knee- and elbow-joints stood out against the staring skin like apples on broomsticks, the hip-bones showed like ploughshares each side the pelvis, the ribs were like the bars of a grating, and every tooth was outlined through the shrunken lips.

The creature bent its skull-face to the stone pavement and licked a little moisture from the trickle of a tiny spring-fed rivulet that crossed the flags, then tried to rouse itself to a sitting posture, tried vainly again, and sank back limply. Slowly, painfully, as if it fought paralysis, it edged across the cold damp stones of the floor, stretched out a bony, tendon-scored hand toward another thing that crouched against the farther wall.

This was—or had been—a man, but now it was no better than a skeleton held in articulation by the skin stretched drum-tight over it. It seemed to rouse to semi-consciousness by the other's movement, and tried desperately to reach the withered hand

stretched toward it. In vain. The chains that tethered the whimpering woman-lich and her companion were barely long enough to stretch from their ring-bolts to the floor, leaving the captives just length of leash enough to lie on the floor, but not permitting them sufficient movement to reach each other, even when their arms were stretched to fullest extent.

And as we watched the prisoners struggle futilely to bring their dying hands together we saw something flutter feebly in the darkness at the rear of the tomb. Chained like the other two the golden-skinned mulatress lay against the wall, and constantly her head turned from side to side and her emaciated body shook with unremitting spasms.

"*Cordieu,* but it was monstrous, that!" de Grandin whispered grittily. "Not content with making them die horribly by slow starvation; not content with making it impossible for them so much as to join hands in their extremity, he chained that other poor one with them that they should be denied all privacy, even in the hour of death!"

He struck his hands together sharply. "*Monsieur!*" he called. "Monsieur Peteros!"

The gruesome scene before us faded as if it had been frescoed on wax melting in quick heat, and through the semi-darkness of the room there swirled a wraithlike cloud of gleaming vapor that hovered like a nimbus above the medium a moment, then, as if he had inhaled it, was absorbed by him. "Eh?" Peteros murmured sleepily. "Did I go into a trance? What did I say?"

"Not a word, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin told him. "You were as dumb as an infant oyster, but through your help we are much wiser. Yes. Certainly. Stay here and rest, for you must be exhausted. The rest of us have duties to perform. Come, *mes amis,*" he looked at me and the Jaquays in turn, "let us go to that abominable tomb, that never-to-be-quite-sufficiently-anathematized sepulchre. We are a century and more too late—we cannot rescue them, *hèlas,* but we can give them what they most desire. Of a surety."

WITH a crowbar we forced back the rust-bound iron door of the Tofte mausoleum and after standing back a moment for the outer air to enter de Grandin led the way into the tomb, playing the beam of his flashlight before him.

"*Voyez! Voilà que!*" he ordered as the shifting shaft of light stabbed through the murky darkness. Death lay at our feet. Arranged in orderly array as if they waited articulation by an osteologist were the bones of three skeletons. Dangling from the ring-bolts of three stone-sealed crypts to the floor beside the skulls were lengths of rust-bitten iron chain. The disintegration of the prisoners' upper spinal columns had loosed the loops of iron latched about their throats. We had no difficulty determining their sex. Even if the widely-opened sciatic notches of the pelvic bones and the smoothly curved angular fronto-nasal articulation of the skulls had not denoted the female skeletons to de Grandin's practiced eye and mine the pitiful relics lying by two of the skulls would have told their story—the amethyst-set gold earrings of the white girl and the patina-encrusted copper loops that once had hung in the mulatress' little ears.

The Frenchman stepped back, bowing as if he addressed three living people. "*Mes pauvres,*" he announced softly, "we are come to give you release from your earth-bound state. Your pleas have been heard; you shall be together in what remains of the flesh. The evil man who boasted of his better, sounder sleep—*parbleu,* but Jules de Grandin makes a monkey out of him!"

"It is a case for the coroner," he told us as we walked back to the house. "We need not tell the things that we saw in the bedroom. The circumstances of the disappearance of Madame Tofte and Monsieur Van Brundt as they appear in the historical records, together with the advertisement crafty old Monsieur Jacob broadcast for the return of the poor Celeste, will be sufficient to establish their identity. As to the manner of their death—*eh bien,* does it not proclaim itself? But certainly."

He smiled grimly. "And that old hypocrite who lies so snugly in St. Chrysostom's churchyard—though it is late in overtaking him his sin has found him out at last. The jury of the coroner cannot help but name him as the murderer of those poor ones."

THE dinner at the Berkeley-York had been a huge success. *Consommé de tortue vert* with sherry, *huîtres Francois* with Chablis, *truite Margery* with Meursault, *coq au vin* with Nuits St. Georges and finally *crêpes Sussettes* with cointreau. As the waiter poured the coffee and Chartreuse I fully expected to hear de Grandin purr. "I suppose it's your theory that the stone and timbers of Tofte House held a certain psychic quality derived from association with the tragedy of Marise Tofte and Merthou Van Brundt, or that these unhappy lovers in the stress of their emotion passed on lasting thought-emanations to their inanimate surroundings?" I asked him. "I've heard you say that dreams or visions can be evoked in psychically sensitive persons when they're permitted to sleep in a room with a chip from a house where some atrocious crime has been committed, or—"

"I would not quite say that," he interrupted with a smile as he took a morsel of pink peppermint between his teeth and sipped a little black coffee. "This, I think, is what we might call a genuine ghost story, one where the earthbound spirits of the dead, denied the rites of Christian burial, sought constantly for help from the living.

"Consider, if you please: That Madame Marise and Monsieur Merthou were about to elope, accompanied by the slave girl Celeste, we have no doubt at all. Also, after seeing what a *bête bas* she had for husband one cannot greatly blame her, especially as she was still in love with her cousin who seems to have been a quiet, amiable young man. Yes.

"Next, we know the naughty old Monsieur Jacob laid a trap for them. He pretended to go on a long voyage, gave them barely time to renew love and make plans for eloping then *pouf!* swooped down on them like a cat on two luckless mice. The sad rest we know also.

"When he had chained them like brute beasts they died all miserably in the tomb, and their poor, starved bodies lay unburied. What then? Year after painful year they sought to tell their plight to those who came to live in that old house, but always they did fail. Those whom they begged for help were frightened and ran off.

"But finally these unhappy cousins who were thwarted in their love were visited by cousins fate had given to each other. And so it came about that we, with Monsieur Peteros' assistance, found their pitiful remains, had their killer branded as a murderer, and after proper rites laid them in consecrated ground. Yes, certainly."

A grim expression settled on his lips. "That poor Celeste, the slave girl, she gave me some trouble," he confided.

"How's that?" asked Georgine Jaquay.

"The sexton of St. Chrysostom's told me the ground was reserved for the burial of white people exclusively. *'Monsieur,'* I say to him, 'this are no woman, but a skeleton I seek to have interred here, and the skeleton of a young girl of color is white as that of a Caucasian. Besides, if you persist in your pig-odious refusal I shall have to tweak your far from handsome nose.' *Tiens,* he let us bury her beside those whose death she had shared."

Georgine Jaquay gave a short neighing laugh, the sort of laugh a person gives to keep from weeping, but in a moment tears glinted on her lashes. "Do you suppose it was because they were cousins, and George and I are cousins, that they finally found peace through us?" she asked.

He raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can achieve. "Who knows, *Madame?* It are entirely possible," he answered. Then with one of his quick elfin grins, "Or possibly it were because you and *Monsieur* your husband had the good sense to consult Jules de Grandin. He is a very clever fellow, that one."

The Man in Purple

By
DOROTHY
QUICK

Oh, yes, he was handsome, compelling—and utterly evil!

Heading by
BORIS DOLGOV

IT WAS early morning when we arrived in Paris. Somehow in those pre-war days it always seemed to be between one and four in the morning when the train slid into the station, no matter how you planned. So, here were we, at 4 a. m., surrounded with luggage in a taxi, on our way to the Albion, the little hotel where Godfrey and I always stayed.

It was a charming hotel, quite unknown to the general public, found for us by some French friends. Godfrey and I were crazy

about it. This was the first time we'd come without reservations. Godfrey had no doubt they'd take us in, but I was not so sanguine. I didn't mind picking up things at a moment's notice and running off with Godfrey —he loved the excitement of doing the unexpected and I loved him—but I usually wired ahead for rooms wherever we were going. This time there literally had been no opportunity to do so and as the taxi drew up before the Albion and honked its horn with the pathos only a French cab can manage, I was worried.

It soon appeared that my forebodings were justified. The clerk, Raoul, whom we knew extremely well, was glad to see us, but not overjoyed as he ordinarily would have been. He was full of apologies and lamentations. "But there is nothing for Madame and Monsieur. Not a single room in the hotel. I am desolate, but it is so. If you had only wired ahead . . ."

I took the bull by the horns. "But, we did, Raoul! Do you mean you didn't get the telegram? We sent it two days ago."

Two days ago we had been in London without the slightest idea of Paris in our, or rather Godfrey's head. But I always believe if one is going to lie, it might as well be wholeheartedly.

Raoul wrung his hands. "Oh, Madame, I am devastated. But there is nothing . . ."

"But surely," Godfrey's calm English voice broke in, "you've got some corner you can tuck us in for the night. You can't turn us out at this hour! Then tomorrow you can fix us up."

A kind of struggle went on in Raoul's face. It was plain to see he was in an agony of indecision. Finally one side of his problem won. But it was obvious, with great reluctance on his part. "There is a suite, on the garden side, perhaps—just for tonight—or what is left of the night—"

"Splendid. And I assure you we won't mind the extra charge," added my practical husband.

Raoul turned to the combination key and letter rack behind him, extracted a key, and called to the bellboy, "Here Pierre. Take Monsieur and Madame to No. 217."

"217?" The boy, half awake, seemed incredulous.

"217," Raoul repeated with an emphasis that stopped whatever the boy had been going to say. Silently he picked up our bags and led the way to the elevator that had been installed in the well of the stairway—one of those open-cage affairs the French delight in, but which my American remembrance of what an elevator can be, dislikes intensely.

As we ascended Raoul called out, *"Dormez bien,"* and Pierre made a sound that up in the Bronx they call a cheer. Evidently he thought we wouldn't sleep well, and I wondered if he had labeled us as bride and groom. He was a new addition to the Albion. He didn't know we'd been coming there for over five years.

He threw open the door of No. 217, turned on the light, sidled the bags in, and was off so quickly that he missed the silver Godfrey had ready to give him. "Remarkable," I exclaimed. Then, as I took in the really charming room, added, "Godfrey, this is the real thing."

IT WAS. Boiserie of an elegance and charm that went with powdered hair, bright silks, and jeweled hands. The delicately carved wood was painted that soft shade of grayish blue which no modern materials can quite achieve. The room had probably been a card room in the time of Marie Antoinette. I could picture the gay scene that had been reflected in the lovely old mirror that was set into the wall above the fireplace. The furniture was gilt and covered in a salmon-pink damask. The whole effect was exquisite.

"This stuff must be worth a great deal," again my practical husband was speaking. "It's genuine—the whole room is a museum piece. Don't wonder they don't like to rent it. Let's look at the bedroom—" He threw open the door and switched on the light.

It was charming, too, but in an utterly different way. It was completely modern, ivory paint, a gay flowered wallpaper of pale yellow with red and blue flowers and a matching chintz for curtains, bedspreads, and slip covers. It sounds wild, but the effect was a sunshiny bower of roses. The furniture was ivory. It was all sweetness and light before I stepped over the threshold. The instant I was in the room, I felt differently. Despite the gayety and the wink-

ing brightness of a crystal chandelier, obviously converted from candles to electricity, I felt a sense of gloom. It was as though a mantle of depression had been flung over my spirit.

"It's a very gay room," my husband said.

"Gay *looking*," I amended. Then I voiced my thoughts. "Don't you think it's odd Raoul held out on us. He was all ready to turn us away—with this up his sleeve."

"Faker! Probably so he can overcharge—"

Godfrey was most likely right. I was silly to go imagining things because of circumstances—the odd glance between Raoul and Pierre, and my own sudden depression. The latter wasn't due to the room. It could not be—it was my own fatigue catching up with me.

GODFREY lugged in the bags, grumbling against Pierre's laziness. I started to say, "Maybe the boy didn't want to come in here," but I caught the words back, and went about my preparations for bed. It was when I was in the bathroom cleaning my teeth that I heard the first knock!

I thought Pierre might have had a troubling conscience and come back. When it came again, I called out: "Why don't you go to the door, Godfrey?"

"Why?" his matter-of-fact voice came back.

"Knocking—"

"Didn't hear anything," but he went through to the living room and I heard him open the door. When he came back he was laughing. "Must be hearing things, old girl."

My twenty-two years always shrink away from Godfrey's "old girl," even though I know it's meant as a form of endearment.

"Didn't you hear anything?" I asked, when reluctantly I returned to the gay room.

"No." Godfrey was bland.

Just at that moment the knocking started again. From Godfrey's start I knew he heard it too. That was a relief! I didn't want to hear noises no one else did.

"People next door," Godfrey said.

"At this hour?"

"Paris is noted for the hours it keeps. They've probably been sampling champagne from *boite* to *boite*, and are now returning from making a night of it."

I wasn't up to arguing. I kissed Godfrey goodnight, and went over to my own twin bed, Godfrey already having made himself comfortable in the other. As I shed by negligée, he turned out the light. Presently I heard his even breathing. I counted his respirations to drown out the knocks which were coming more frequently now. They obviously didn't bother him, but they did things to me. The linen sheets were cold and clammy. So was I, but not because of them. I was afraid!

There was something strange about these rooms. Raoul wouldn't have held out on us without a good reason. He had obviously given them to us with great reluctance. I was beginning to understand why. The knocking was getting louder now. It seemed to be coming from everywhere—all around my head. If it were the people next door, they were bowling on the wall behind my bed. It was only because I was completely exhausted that I fell asleep. Or, was it sleep? One minute I was exasperated at the knocking and afraid of something, I didn't know what. The next minute the knocking ceased and I was afraid—afraid of the man in purple!

HE STOOD in the doorway, very tall, very elegant, with a purple moiré waistcoat lavishly embroidered in heavy gold thread. He wore it over a lavender vest, and he had on purple satin trousers that ended below his knee. A diamond buckle fastened them and they undoubtedly served as garters for his elegant purple hose. He wore black slippers with diamond buckles. There was a flash of the same stones on the vest and real lace cascaded down his front and from his sleeves. His hair was powdered, and his face was utterly evil. The Marquis de Sade must have looked like that about midway in his career, when the good looks nature had endowed him with were being superseded by the ideas and practices that were essentially his own.

The man in purple was handsome. I could see him plainly by the light coming through the transom. A truly elegant figure of a man, but his lips were sensuous and cruel, his eyes cold, yet compelling in some

strange, fascinating way. He looked toward me and I turned cold in my innermost veins. "If he speaks to me, I shall die," I thought.

But he didn't. His black malicious eyes held mine and he came nearer.

I couldn't move. If he'd been a snake charmer and I the snake, I couldn't have been more in his power, although the illustration was twisted, for it was he who resembled the snake, not I. Even his powdered wig didn't disguise the fact his head was shaped like an adder's head. He came up to the bed, close to me, while I lay completely paralyzed with fear beyond anything I could describe. Then he put his arms up, shook the lace back from his wrists and reached for my throat!

From somewhere I got strength enough to scream. The next second the man in purple had gone, and Godfrey was beside me. "What on earth—?" he was saying.

"I had a dream," I gasped. "A horrible dream—" but even while I said the words, I knew it hadn't been a dream. The man in purple had been real.

Eventually Godfrey went back to bed and to sleep. Nothing disturbed him. This time I went to sleep, but the man in purple was in my dreams, coming to me, freeing his wrists from the lace, reaching for my throat—finding it!

I woke up gasping for air, with actual pressure on my windpipe. It was more than a dream. The man in purple had come again.

I couldn't stand any more of this. I knew now it was a ghost. The man in purple had to be a ghost. There was no other explanation possible. I was quite sure, and further, positive that was the reason Raoul hadn't wanted us to stay. He *knew* about that man in purple.

I had two alternatives—to wake Godfrey, or get away from this room. Unfortunately for me, I chose the latter. Godfrey looked so comfortable I hated to rouse him again, and besides, I knew he'd laugh at the idea of a ghost. So I got out of bed, took the inevitable taffeta-covered eiderdown quilt always to be found on French beds, and tiptoed into the sitting room. I curled up in the eiderdown on the couch.

Again, I couldn't sleep. The man in purple was in my thoughts. I couldn't shake him off. I kept seeing him and his gesture of freeing his hands from encumbrances so that he would be free to murder. I kept feeling his hands reaching for my throat. But at long, long last, with the assistance of at least two hundred and fifty sheep that I laboriously counted, I fell into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion that comes when one is worn out mentally as well as physically.

A whispering woke me up—a whispering in French—French of the old style. If I hadn't spoken the language like a native I wouldn't have understood the whisperings. As it was, it was difficult—just as strange as listening to the talk of our Founding Fathers would be to modern ears.

The whispers said over and over, "Bring her here, Pierre. Bring her here to me and then go. Do not return no matter what you hear." And then there was a pause—a silence, while I heard a door shut and footsteps walk away. Then the whispers began again. "Soon, soon she will come," repeated a voice which had a hard quality underneath the softness of its tone and an underlying cruelty, and I knew that it was the voice of the man in purple, but I could not see him. I knew fear again and shrank into the eiderdown. Suppose those hands found my throat again—suppose— I wanted to scream, to run to Godfrey, but I couldn't move, and in the strange nightmare of events I know I shouldn't, and the knowledge was horrible.

The whisperings were gaining strength and volubility. It was an ordinary voice that spoke now in that antiquated French. "She is coming—she is here." As he mouthed the last word I could see him. It was the man in purple standing by the carved mantelpiece, watching the door. He was quite tangible, there was nothing ghost-like about him—no transparency, no luminosity—just a man out of another world. An evil man—his lips strained back from his teeth as a dog's do at the kill.

The door swung open, and I gasped. For there coming into the room was myself! Not the American Helen married to the English Godfrey, but a French Heléne. Not the frightened girl crouching on the sofa in her own time, but a frightened girl from some other age. The two entities were sepa-

rate, yet she was part of me just as I was part of her. *I* had been that girl, and I was looking at my own past—!

She was in the room now, sweeping low to the floor in a curtsey of the utmost grace. "Monsieur," she said, gently, but because she and I were one, I knew the effort she made to keep her voice steady. I felt the chill of her finger-tips, the frantic beating of her heart.

He raised her cold fingers to his lips. She shrank away from his touch. "So, Mademoiselle la Comtesse, you hate me for what I have done?"

She made no answer except with her eyes which justified his statement.

He let go her hand. "Yet I saved your father—"

"At a price, Monsieur." There was scorn in her voice.

He bowed. "As you say—at a price. Still, he is safe in England. That should be a fair exchange."

"My father would not think so—" There was color in her pale cheeks as she spoke, but it faded rapidly away.

"Nor do you—" his lips curved back from his teeth again in a gesture that was completely feline. "And what is more, you do not let me forget it. Your hatred for me is a wall between us. Your scorn is sharp knives that cut my flesh. Yes, great though I am, I feel small before you, and that is not to be endured."

"I cannot change my feelings, Monsieur." There was triumph on her face, all the more intense because it was restrained.

"But I can change your feelings, Mademoiselle! I can allow them the expanse of heaven, where the priests tell us there is only love, where I shall not be able to see them." He raised his hands in that familiar gesture, shaking back the lace to leave them free, and advanced toward her.

I felt the terror sweep over her, the loneliness, the pain. "Never to see my father again," she thought. "To have brought him to safety and not to share it. I would be glad to die were it not for him, but he needs me." Then as the man in purple advanced toward her, she sank down on her knees.

"Oh, Monsieur, I beg you spare my life. You promised once my father was safe, I could go to him. Surely you will not go back on your word. See, I who are proud, kneel before you."

I could have told her there was no use. I could see the inexorable purpose in those uplifted hands.

The man in purple laughed. It was a horrible laugh, deadly in intent. "So, the Comtesse de Tréves begs—and for once there is no sneer in her voice. Too late, my dear. Too late, Mademoiselle. Hate rouses hate."

She looked up at him then. "You are right, Monsieur. Hate rouses hate. It feeds upon it too, and I tell you now that my hate will live on down through the centuries until we two meet again, and the tables are turned."

"I will conquer then as I conquer now." He was almost within reach of her.

"Then I will come back again and again —age after age, and in the end, the score will be evened. I vow it so, Monsieur. Here and now, with death staring me in the face. And I curse you as no man has ever been cursed before. Here you shall stay and wait until I come again and then—"

THE hands of the man in purple flashed downwards to her throat, choking the words back into it, exerting more and more pressure until only her eyes blazed hate. Then he let go.

I was gasping — struggling and everything was growing black. There were fingers on my throat. Was I feeling the sensations of my ancient self that realistically?

This time the man in purple hadn't been touching me. It was the Comtesse de Tréves whose throat he held between those strong white hands, into whose windpipe the iron fingers pressed. And yet, with a tremendous effort I opened my eyes. There was no Comtesse de Tréves. There was no man in purple. But there *were* fingers around my throat—exerting such pressure that I could hardly breath—strong, white, deadly fingers — Godfrey's fingers! And everything was growing black. There were fingers on my throat, and I was feeling the sensations of my ancient self—but, Godfrey's fingers were dispensing death! His

face had no expression whatsoever. It was the face of a sleep-walker or a zombie, but his fingers were alive.

I tried to break their hold. I tried to scream, to pull those hands away from my throat—but I couldn't.

If it hadn't been for the eiderdown I should have been dead already. But I had drawn it up close around me and it was between my throat and those terrible fingers of Godfrey's. Even in the haze that was coming over me, I couldn't reconcile my thoughts to their being Godfrey's. The comforter prevented the fingers getting an absolute hold. It was slippery and the fact of it being there enabled me to breath a little. I saw that soon Godfrey's fingers would get a strangle hold. I had only a minute. There was a table beside the couch with an old porcelain vase on it. Somehow I managed to reach it with one hand, struggling all the time with what seemed to be Godfrey's superhuman strength. Still I got the vase in my hand, clasped its narrow neck, pulled it around and shattered it on Godfrey's head.

His fingers loosened. For one second his eyes held a startled expression, then he slumped down to the floor.

From somewhere I heard a soft voice, like the whisper of a sigh, "The score is evened."

I pulled myself together. Godfrey lay crumpled on the floor. I couldn't see any sign of life. I got to the telephone, and lifted off the instrument. Through my tortured throat I somehow got out the words, "Help! Help!" Then I fainted.

When I came to, Raoul was there and a doctor. Evidently a guest of the hotel as he had on a bathrobe over his pajamas. I was in the bedroom. I tried to talk and found I couldn't make a sound, but I mouthed the word, "Godfrey?"

"Madame, you must prepare yourself for a shock. Your husband . . . is dead. The burglar who choked you, hit him on the head with a vase when he came to your rescue. A very gallant gentleman, your husband. It is to be regretted that some nothing of a sneak thief should be the cause of terminating his life."

It was a long, elegantly phrased speech, typical of the French mind. The news wasn't a shock to me. I had known Godfrey was dead when I saw him crumpled on the floor. Twice, while the doctor was talking, I tried to break in to tell him that he was wrong—there had been no burglar, but I couldn't speak. My throat seemed paralyzed. Then, through my chaotic thoughts came some common sense. The truth was too incredible to be believed. With a rush of panic I remembered the tales I had heard of the French police and their endless red tape. I decided it was better to leave it as it was. They seemed to have built up a good explanation of events. What if they weren't quite true. It would be better that way. I would let it go.

Raoul was saying, "We have had several times trouble with sneak thieves already. He had picked the lock of your suite. The door was open."

Needless to tell him that Godfrey never locked doors. Everything was fitting in to support their story.

The doctor was telling me a nurse was coming to put cold compresses on my throat. I was not to worry—they would attend to all details. He also said he had given me a hypodermic for the pain. I managed to indicate that I did not want to stay where I was.

He looked bewildered, but Raoul understood. "It is light, now, Madame." He pointed to the window and I could see the first thin slivers of sunlight. Raoul went on. "You will be quite all right, Madame, and later in the day—long before it is dark—I will see you are moved."

It was with that assurance that I went to sleep.

When I woke, I had been moved as promised. Through the days that followed I didn't let myself think. It wasn't until I was leaving to go back to England that I pinned him down.

"Raoul," I said, "those rooms you gave us that night—they are haunted."

Shamefacedly he answered. "Yes, Madame. This hotel once was the home of a French noble, a very great nobleman, who managed to survive the Revolution because of his friendship with Phillipe L'Egalité. He maintained his power in the days of that gory holocaust. That has always stained

the white fingers of France. He was not a nice man. There are rumors of the things he did that I would not repeat to Madame. He was responsible for many deaths. Those rooms are in the oldest part of the building. They were his. People have seen him . . . dressed in purple. At first we tried to rent the rooms, ignoring the ghost-talk as old wives tales, but the guests complained. They saw him, they said, and he was evil. They felt the evil if they did not see it. One woman who was very psychic, said she saw him strangling someone. She was quite ill afterwards. . . ."

"Had he ever strangled anyone?" I broke in.

"Yes, Madame. So I have heard. He was proud of his strong hands. I once saw a picture of a young Comtesse he was supposed to have killed because she did not return his love. She looked rather like you, Madame. We haven't rented those rooms for a long time. Did you see anything, Madame, before the burglar came?"

So, we were to carry on with the burglar to the bitter end. It was too late now to do anything else when the authorities had concurred with the story so readily. "Yes, Raoul. I saw—the man in purple," I said slowly."

THE Man in Purple! Godfrey! Had they been one and the same? Certainly the Comtesse de Tréves was myself. I hadn't needed Raoul's talk of the resemblance to the picture to know that. The Man in Purple had killed her, but before she died she had cursed him—had condemned him to wait for her until she evened the score. Had that happened when I had, to save myself, killed Godfrey? Had Godfrey been the re-incarnation of the Man in Purple? Had he used him to try to conquer me?—The re-incarnation of the girl he had murdered.

Had he in some strange way taken possession of Godfrey's body for his own unholy purposes? Was Godfrey the man I loved?

Or was he the evil person whom I still regarded with horror? Had fate brought us to the rooms to work out destiny's pattern, or was it—? The questions were endless and they had been rotating in my mind for days. Ever since the night Godfrey died.

"It's a strange thing, Madame," Raoul was saying, "the room is no longer haunted. First the maid tells me she does not hear the knocking any more. Then the floorman tells me the same. So I spent a night there myself, and there was—nothing! Absolutely nothing. Not even a feeling of evil. This last week I have rented the rooms and there have been no complaints. Is it not strange, Madame?"

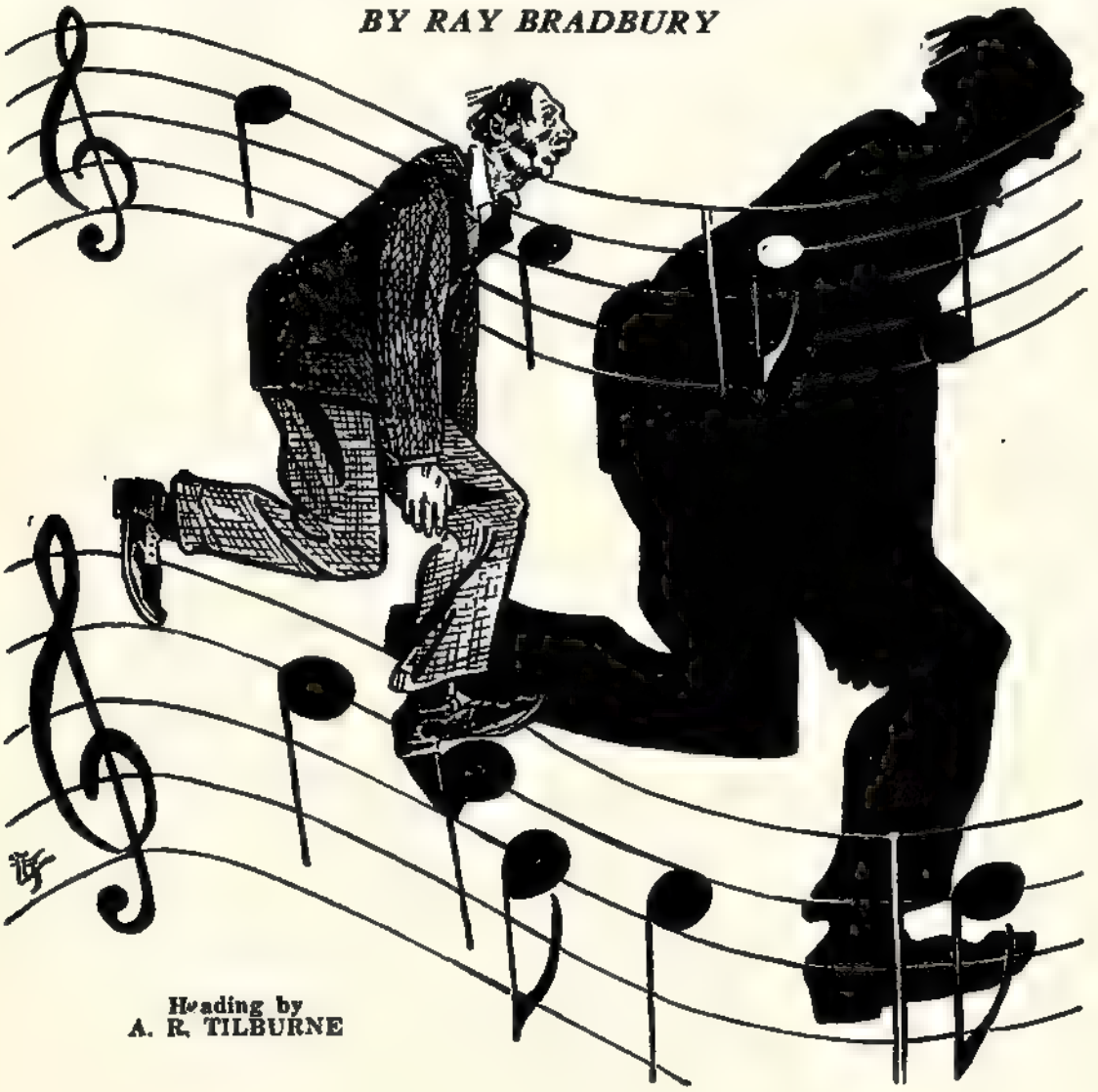
"Yes, Raoul." I couldn't say more. I had the answer to my questions now. Godfrey *had* been the Man in Purple. I no longer felt grief or guilt over his death. The Comtesse de Tréves had made good her promise. She had evened the score. The pendulum had swung wide and then gone back into place. The cycle was complete.

The Smiling People

Each sound had to be muffled for each sound was fear

BY RAY BRADBURY

IT WAS the sensation of silence that was the most notable aspect of the house. As Mr. Greppin came through the front door the oiled silence of it opening and swinging closed behind him was like an opening and shutting dream, a thing accomplished on rubber pads, bathed in lubricant, slow and unmaterialistic. The double



Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

carpet in the hall, which he himself had so recently laid, gave off no sound from his movements. And when the wind shook the house late of nights there was not a rattle of eave or tremor of loose sash. He had himself checked the storm windows. The screen doors were securely hooked with bright new, firm hooks, and the furnace did not knock but sent a silent whisper of warm wind up the throats of the heating system that sighed ever so quietly, moving the cuffs of his trousers as he stood, now, warming himself from the bitter afternoon.

Weighing the silence with the remarkable instruments of pitch and balance in his small ears, he nodded with satisfaction that the silence was so unified and finished. Because there *had* been nights when rats had walked between wall-layers and it had taken baited traps and poisoned food before the walls were mute. Even the grandfather clock had been stilled, its brass pendulum hung frozen and gleaming in its long cedar, glass-fronted coffin.

They were waiting for him in the dining room.

He listened. They made no sound. Good. Excellent, in fact. They had learned, then, to be silent. You had to teach people, but it was worth while—there was not a rattle of knife or fork from the dining table. He worked off his thick grey gloves, hung up his cold armor of overcoat and stood there with an expression of urgency yet indecisiveness . . . thinking of what had to be done.

Mr. Greppin proceeded with familiar certainty and economy of motion into the dining room, where the four individuals seated at the waiting table did not move or speak a word. The only sound was the merest allowable pad of his shoes on the deep carpet.

His eyes, as usual, instinctively, fastened upon the lady heading the table. Passing, he waved a finger near her cheek. She did not blink.

Aunt Rose sat firmly at the head of the table and if a mote of dust floated lightly down out of the ceiling spaces, did her eye trace its orbit? Did the eye revolve in its shellacked socket, with glassy cold precision? And if the dust mote happened upon the shell of her wet eye did the eye batten? Did the muscles clinch, the lashes close?

No.

Aunt Rose's hand lay on the table like cutlery, rare and fine and old; tarnished. Her bosom was hidden in a salad of fluffy linen.

Beneath the table her stick legs in high-buttoned shoes went up into a pipe of dress. You felt that the legs terminated at the skirt line and from there on she was a department store dummy, all wax and nothingness responding, probably, with much the same chill waxen movements, with as much enthusiasm and response as a mannequin.

So here was Aunt Rose, staring straight at Greppin—he choked out a laugh and clapped hands derisively shut—there were the first hints of a dust mustache gathering across her upper lip!

"Good evening, Aunt Rose," he said, bowing. "Good evening, Uncle Dimity," he said, graciously. "No, not a word," he held up his hand. "Not a word from any of you." He bowed again. "Ah, good evening, cousin Lila, and you, cousin Sam."

Lila sat upon his left, her hair like golden shavings from a tube of lathed brass. Sam, opposite her, told all directions with *his* hair.

They were both young, he fourteen, she sixteen. Uncle Dimity, their father (but "father" was a nasty word!) sat next to Lila, placed in this secondary niche long, long ago because Aunt Rose said the window draft might get his neck if he sat at the head of the table. Ah, Aunt Rose!

Mr. Greppin drew the chair under his tight-clothed little rump and put a casual elbow to the linen.

"I've something to say," he said. "IT's very important. This has gone on for weeks now. It can't go any further. I'm in love. Oh, but I've told you that long ago. On the day I made you all smile, remember?"

THE eyes of the four seated people did not blink, the hands did not move.

Greppin became introspective. The day he had made them smile. Two weeks ago it was. He had come home, walked in, looked at them and said, "I'm to be married!"

They had all whirled with expressions as if someone had just smashed the window.

"You're WHAT?" cried Aunt Rose.

"To Alice Jane Ballard!" he had said, stiffening somewhat.

"Congratulations," said Uncle Dimity. "I guess," he added, looking at his wife. He cleared his throat. "But isn't it a little early, son?" He looked at his wife again. "Yes. Yes, I think it's a little early. I wouldn't advise it yet, not just yet, no."

"The house is in a terrible way," said Aunt Rose. "We won't have it fixed for a year yet."

"That's what you said last year and the year before," said Mr. Greppin. "And anyway," he said bluntly, "this is *my* house."

Aunt Rose's jaw had clamped at that. "After all these years for us to be bodily thrown out, why I—"

"You won't be thrown out, don't be idiotic," said Greppin, furiously.

"Now, Rose—" said Uncle Dimity in a pale tone.

Aunt Rose dropped her hands. "After all I've done—"

In that instant Greppin had known they would *have* to go, all of them. First he would make them silent, then he would make them smile, then, later, he would move them out like luggage. He couldn't bring Alice Jane into a house full of grims such as these, where Aunt Rose followed you wherever you went even when she wasn't following you, and the children performed indignities upon you at a glance from their maternal parent, and the father, no better than a third child, carefully rearranged his advice to you on being a bachelor. Greppin stared at them. It was their fault that his loving and living was all wrong. If he did something about them —then his warm bright dreams of soft bodies glowing with an anxious perspiration of love might become tangible and near. Then he would have the house all to himself and—and Alice Jane. Yes, Alice Jane.

They would have to go. Quickly. If he told them to go, as he had often done, twenty years might pass as Aunt Rose gathered sunbleached sachets and Edison phonographs. Long before then Alice Jane herself would be moved and gone.

Greppin looked at them as he picked up the carving knife.

GREPPIN'S head snapped with tiredness. He flicked his eyes open. Eh? Oh, he had been drowsing, thinking.

All *that* had occurred two weeks ago. Two weeks ago this very night that conversation about marriage, moving, Alice Jane, had come about. Two weeks ago it had been. Two weeks ago he had made them smile.

Now, recovering from his reverie, he smiled around at the silent and motionless figures. They smiled back in peculiarly pleasing fashion.

"I hate you, old woman," he said to Aunt Rose, directly. "Two weeks ago I wouldn't have dared say that. Tonight, ah, well—" he lazed his voice, turning. "Uncle Dimity, let me give you a little advice, old man—"

He talked small talk, picked up a spoon, pretended to eat peaches from an empty dish. He had already eaten downtown in a tray cafeteria; pork, potatoes, apple pie, string beans, beets, potato salad. But now he made dessert eating motions because he enjoyed this little act. He made as if he were chewing.

"So—tonight you are finally, once and for all, moving out. I've waited two weeks, thinking it all over. In a way I guess I've kept you here this long because I wanted to keep an eye on you. Once you're gone, I can't be sure—" And here his eyes gleamed with fear. "You might come prowling around, making noises at night, and I couldn't stand that. I can't ever have noises in this house, not even when Alice moves in. . . ."

The double carpet was thick and soundless underfoot, reassuring.

"Alice wants to move in day after tomorrow. We're getting married."

Aunt Rose winked evilly, doubtfully at him.

"Ah!" he cried, leaping up, then, staring, he sank down, mouth convulsing. He released the tension in him, laughing. "Oh, I see. It was a fly." He watched the fly crawl with slow precision on the ivory cheek of Aunt Rose and dart away. Why did it have to pick that instant to make her eye appear to blink, to doubt. "Do you doubt I ever will marry, Aunt Rose? Do you think me incapable of marriage, of love

and love's duties? Do you think me immature, unable to cope with a woman and her ways of living? Do you think me a child, only daydreaming? Well!" He calmed himself with an effort, shaking his head. "Man, man," he argued to himself. "It was only a fly, and does a fly make doubt of love, or did you make it into a fly and a wink? Damn it!" He pointed at the four of them.

"I'm going to fix the furnace hotter. In an hour I'll be moving you out of the house once and for all. You comprehend? Good. I see you do."

Outside, it was beginning to rain, a cold drizzling downpour that drenched the house. A look of irritation came to Greppin's face. The sound of the rain was the one thing he couldn't stop, couldn't be helped. No way to buy new hinges or lubricants or hooks for that. You might tent the housetop with lengths of cloth to soften the sound, mightn't you? That's going a bit far. No. No way of preventing the rain sounds.

He wanted silence now, where he had never wanted it before in his life so much. Each sound was a fear. So each sound had to be muffled, gotten to and eliminated.

The drum of rain was like the knuckles of an impatient man on a surface. He lapsed again into remembering.

He remembered the rest of it. The rest of that hour on that day two weeks ago when he had made them smile. . . .

He had taken up the carving knife and prepared to cut the bird upon the table. As usual the family had been gathered, all wearing their solemn, puritanical masks. If the children smiled the smiles were stepped on like nasty bugs by Aunt Rose.

Aunt Rose criticized the angle of Greppin's elbows as he cut the bird. The knife, she made him understand also, was not sharp enough. Oh, yes, the sharpness of the knife. At this point in his memory he stopped, rolled-tilted his eyes, and laughed. Dutifully, then, he had crisped the knife on the sharpening rod and again set upon the fowl.

He had severed away much of it in some minutes before he slowly looked up at their solemn, critical faces, like puddings with agate eyes, and after staring at them a moment, as if discovered with a naked woman instead of a naked-limbed partridge, he lifted the knife and cried hoarsely, "Why in God's name can't you, any of you, ever smile? I'll *make* you smile!"

He raised the knife a number of times like a magician's wand.

And, in a short interval—behold! they were *all* of them smiling!

HE BROKE that memory in half, crumpled it, balled it, tossed it down. Rising briskly, he went to the hall, down the hall to the kitchen, and from there down the dim stairs into the cellar where he opened the furnace door and built the fire steadily and expertly into wonderful flame.

Walking upstairs again he looked about him. He would have cleaners come and clean the empty house, redecorators slide down the dull drapes and hoist new shimmery banners up. New thick Oriental rugs purchased for the floors would subtly insure the silence he desired and would need at least for the next month, if not for the entire year.

He put his hands to his face. What if Alice Jane made noise moving about the house? Some noise, some how, some place!

And then he laughed. It was quite a joke. That problem was already solved. Yes, it was solved. He need fear no noise from Alice Jane. It was all absurdly simple. He would have all the pleasure of Alice Jane and none of the dream-destroying distractions and discomforts.

There was one other addition needed to the quality of silence. Upon the tops of the doors that the wind sucked shut with a bang at frequent intervals he would install air-compression brakes, those kind they have on library doors that hiss gently as their levers seal.

He passed through the dining room. The figures had not moved from their tableau. Their hands remained affixed in familiar positions, and their indifference to him was not impoliteness.

He climbed the hall stairs to change his clothing, preparatory to the task of moving the family. Taking the links from his fine cuffs, he swung his head to one side. Music. At first he paid it no mind. Then, slowly,

his face swinging to the ceiling, the color drained out of his cheeks.

At the very apex of the house the music began, note by note, one note following another, and it terrified him.

Each note came like a plucking of one single harp thread. In the complete silence the small sound of it was made larger until it grew all out of proportion to itself, gone mad with all this soundlessness to stretch about in.

The door opened in an explosion from his hands, the next thing his feet were trying the stairs to the third level of the house, the bannister twisted in a long polished snake under his tightening, relaxing, reaching-up, pulling-hands! The steps went under to be replaced by longer, higher, darker steps. He had started the game at the bottom with a slow stumbling, now he was running with full impetus and if a wall had suddenly confronted him he would not have stopped for it until he saw blood on it and fingernail scratches where he tried to pass through.

He felt like a mouse running in a great clear space of a bell. And high in the bell sphere the one harp thread hummed. It drew him on, caught him up with an unbilical of sound, gave his fear sustenance and life, mothered him. Fears passed between mother and groping child. He sought to shear the connection with his hands, could not. He felt as if someone had given a heave on the cord, wriggling.

Another clear threaded tone. And another.

"No, keep quiet," he shouted. "There can't be noise in my house. Not since two weeks ago. I said there would be no more noise. So it can't be—it's impossible! Keep quiet!"

He burst upward into the attic.

Relief can be hysteria.

Teardrops fell from a vent in the roof and struck, shattering upon a tall neck of Swedish cut-glass flowerware with resonant tone.

He shattered the vase with one swift move of his triumphant foot!

PICKING out and putting on an old shirt and old pair of pants in his room, he chuckled. The music was gone, the vent plugged, the silence again insured. There are silences and silences. Each with its own identity. There were summer night silences, which weren't silences at all, but layer on layer of insect chorals and the sound of electric arc lamps swaying in lonely small orbits on lonely country roads, casting out feeble rings of illumination upon which the night fed—summer night silence which, to be a silence, demanded an indolence and a neglect and an indifference upon the part of the listener. Not a silence at all! And there was a winter silence, but it was an incoffined silence, ready to burst out at the first touch of spring, things had a compression, a not-for-long feel, the silence made a sound unto itself, the freezing was so complete it made chimes of everything or detonations of a single breath or word you spoke at midnight in the diamond air. No, it was not a silence worthy of the name. A silence between two lovers, when there need be no words. Color came in his cheeks, he shut his eyes. It was a most pleasant silence, a perfect silence with Alice Jane. He had seen to that. *Everything* was perfect.

Whispering.

He hoped the neighbors hadn't heard him shrieking like a fool.

A faint whispering.

Now, about silences. The best silence was one conceived in every aspect by an individual, himself, so that there could be no bursting of crystal bonds, or electric-insect hummings, the human mind could cope with each sound, each emergency, until such a complete silence was achieved that one could hear ones cells adjust in ones hand.

A whispering.

He shook his head. There was no whispering. There could be none in *his* house. Sweat began to seep down his body, he began to shake in small, imperceptible shakings, his jaw loosened, his eyes were turned free in their sockets.

Whisperings. Low rumors of talk.

"I tell you I'm getting married," he said, weakly, loosely.

"You're lying," said the whispers.

His head fell forward on its neck as if hung, chin on chest.

"Her name is Alice Jane Ballard—" he

mouthed it between soft, wet lips and the words were formless. One of his eyes began to jitter its lid up and down as if blinking out a message to some unseen guest. "You can't stop me from loving her, I love her—"

Whispering.

He took a blind step forward.

The cuff of his pants leg quivered as he reached the floor grille of the ventilator. A hot rise of air followed his cuffs. Whispering.

The furnace.

HE WAS on his way downstairs when someone knocked on the front door.

He leaned against it. "Who is it?"

"Mr. Greppin?"

Greppin drew in his breath. "Yes?"

"Will you let us in, please?"

"Well, who is it?"

"The police," said the man outside.

"What do you want, I'm just sitting down to supper!"

"Just want a talk with you. The neighbors phoned. Said they hadn't seen your Aunt and Uncle for two weeks. Heard a noise awhile ago—"

"I assure you everything is all right." He forced a laugh.

"Well, then," continued the voice outside, "we can talk it over in friendly style if you'll only open the door."

"I'm sorry," insisted Greppin. "I'm tired and hungry, come back tomorrow. I'll talk to you then, if you want me to."

"I'll have to insist, Mr. Greppin."

They began to beat against the door.

Greppin turned automatically, stiffly, walked down the hall past the old clock, into the dining room, without a word. He seated himself without looking at any one in particular and then he began to talk, slowly at first, then more rapidly.

"Some pests at the door. You'll talk to them, won't you, Aunt Rose? You'll tell them to go away, won't you, we're eating dinner? Everyone else go on eating and look pleasant and they'll go away, if they do come in. Aunt Rose you *will* talk to them, won't you? And now that things are happening I have something to tell you." A few hot tears fell for no reason. He looked at them as they soaked and spread in the white linen, vanishing. "I don't know any one named Alice Jane Ballard. I never knew any one named Alice Jane Ballard. It was all—all—I don't know. I said I loved her and wanted to marry her to get around somehow to make you smile. Yes, I said it because I planned to make you smile, that was the only reason. I'm never going to have a woman, I always knew for years I never would have. Will you please pass the potatoes, Aunt Rose?"

THE front door splintered and fell. A heavy softened rushing filled the hall. Men broke into the dining room.

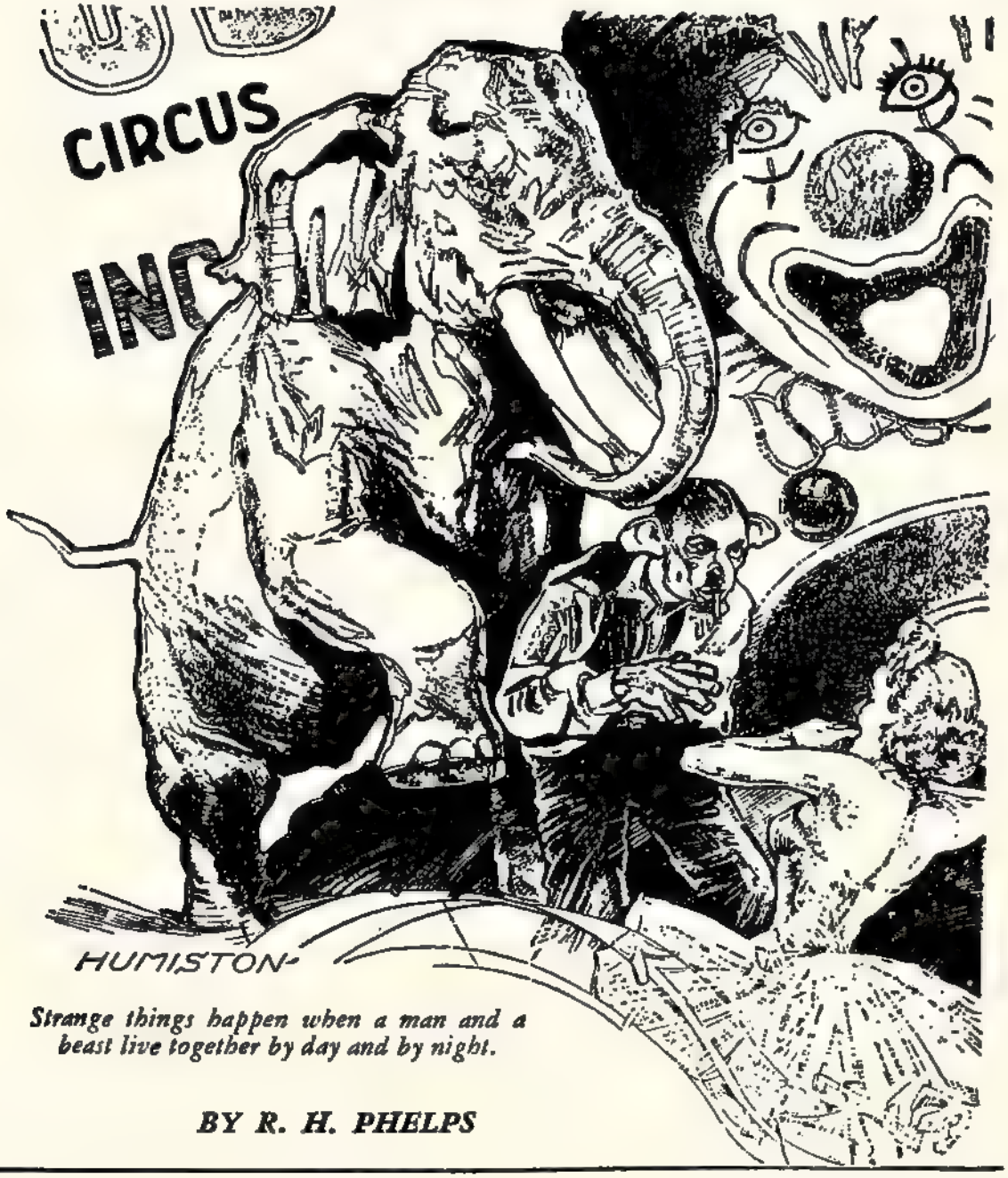
A hesitation.

The police inspector hastily removed his hat.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he apologized. "I didn't mean to intrude upon your supper, I—"

The sudden halting of the police was such that their movement shook the room. The movement catapulted the bodies of Aunt Rose and Uncle Dimity straight away to the carpet, where they lay, their throats severed in a half moon from ear to ear—which caused them, like the children seated at the table, to have what was the horrid illusion of a smile under their chins, ragged smiles that welcomed in the late arrivals and told them everything with a simple grimace. . . .

Once There Was an Elephant



Strange things happen when a man and a beast live together by day and by night.

BY R. H. PHELPS

BLACK DIAMOND, the six-ton bull elephant, pride of Haley's London and New York Circus, was sick. The afternoon show had gone on without the royal presence for the first time since anyone could remember and now he stood swaying and weaving in his place in the elephant tent, eyes closed, knees sagging and trunk hanging lifelessly.

If he had not been sick, Black Diamond

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

would have resented the presence of Linda O'Dell, diminutive pad and bareback rider who stood nearby, the top of her red head barely reaching to his tusks. She was steadying the stepladder for the circus vet while the latter made a gingerly examination of the elephant's rubbery eyes, and under ordinary circumstances the ill-natured pachyderm would have sent her scurrying away with lashing trunk, and blown dirt after her to boot.

Black Diamond was an African, and like most of his kind, of dumb and unfriendly temperament. But toward Linda he entertained a particular aversion. In his confused brain he sensed her as a rival for the affections of Otto, his keeper and his idol, and he was fiercely jealous. If he had dared, he would have killed her before now.

As for Linda, she had no love for Black Diamond—in fact, quite the reverse. She wanted to marry Otto and take him off to the dilapidated farm in Vermont with the huge maples on either side of the broken-down front porch, her paternal heritage and only property. It was her dream to leave the circus, no longer appreciative of her bareback somersaults, and go farming with the big, hulking elephant man, who would make an excellent hand with livestock. But Black Diamond stood in her way, as surely as though his towering bulk were chained between the two maples, denying her passage to her own property.

Nevertheless, now that the elephant was sick, Linda was worried, and for reasons strictly personal to herself. So, too, was Sam Harris, the veterinarian, as he climbed down the stepladder. He had on the black derby which he customarily wore when professionally engaged and his black bow tie was askew in his celluloid collar.

Sam had seen a cross-eyed towner at the afternoon show and though he had made his fingers into a V and spat between them he had been expecting bad luck ever since. He pushed back the derby and mopped his red face with a dirty handkerchief, eyeing the elephant keeper resentfully.

"Your elephant's got pink eye," he said to Otto. "Elephants ain't supposed to get pink eye but he's got it."

He climbed back up the ladder with a bottle and a cotton swab.

Otto was shuffling aimlessly about his charge, rumbling and mumbling in elephant language, as he tried to bring the animal's trunk alive with a pail of hot mash and salt. Linda's eyes were tender as they followed him. But there was deep trouble in them, too. For Otto had gotten to look like an elephant, and there was no use denying it. Of course, he was older now, and that might account for his stoop and his shuffling walk. But his nose had grown thicker and longer, his ears larger and of an unmistakable protuberancy. Of late Linda had noticed with horror that they seemed to be curving over and downward at the top. Even his eyes, once so bold and frank, were growing shifty and small, and he talked in a guttural rumble. Strange things happen when a man and a beast live together by day and by night for a decade.

THERE had been other things, too—that limp, for instance. It affected everybody when Black Diamond came down with a limp, because the circus parade takes its pace from the elephants and the elephants take their pace from the king elephant, which was Black Diamond. It had slowed everything up and the show was late in starting that day. But the thing of it was that Otto came down with the same limp and on the same side. There was a shaking of heads and furtive whisperings among the troopers, who are the most superstitious people in the world. All except down clown alley, where anything unusual is turned to good account.

Chilly Billy and Poodles put on an act which brought down the house—the lame elephant and the lame keeper—and bade fair to be a great success. That is, until Linda saw it. Linda had a temperament which went well with her red hair and when her act was over she rode right into clown alley on her white stallion, her small face pale with anger. The two clowns were folding up their fake elephant skin as the stallion reared up and struck down at them with sharp knives. By fast footwork they got away unhurt and Linda and the horse finished with the elephant skin. After that, the act was never repeated, though whenever there was a spell of bad weather Black Diamond and his keeper would limp together.

These things may have been just coinci-

dence, of course, but Sam Harris, full of superstitious fancies, thought otherwise. If Otto was going to be a Siamese twin with his elephant, he, Sam, wanted as little as possible to do with either of them. His professional duty done, he hastily made off toward the animal cages, Linda trailing along. When they were out of earshot, she tugged at his sleeve.

"You don't suppose, now," she said, "that Otto'll be getting that pink eye, do you, Sam?"

"Hell, Linda," said the vet, "no man catches animal's diseases." Then he added uneasily, "Leastways they ain't supposed to."

He moved off, anxious to be rid of her, but Linda tagged after him.

"It isn't a case of *catching* something," she said. "You know how it is with Otto and that elephant. You might almost say that Otto *is* that elephant. I don't want Otto to get pink eye. It'll look funny to the circus. You got to do something, Sam."

"I done all I could, Linda," he said, "and I seen a cross-eyed man today. Like as not I'll get an arm clawed off by one of them striped cats. I don't want to hear no more about them onnatural things."

As Linda walked back past the elephant line, Otto came shuffling out to meet her.

"He won't eat, Linda, and he won't drink. I don't know what to do."

He was standing feet apart, his ponderous body weaving from side to side in cadence, it seemed to Linda, with the sick elephant. Suddenly impatient, she snapped at him:

"Get a hot water bottle and hold it on his stomach all night, you big hunkie." Then seeing the hurt look in his eyes, she added, "Unless, by any chance, you might like to take Linda into town tonight after the show?"

Otto looked at her reprovingly.

"Black Diamond might need me tonight," he rumbled. "He might need me bad."

She pushed by him and as she passed Black Diamond she spat venomously in the direction of the towering rump.

"Damn rubber cow," she fumed.

* * * * *

It had always been like that. Ever since she had first set eyes on Otto ten years ago as he came walking down the midway, big and cocky and confident, his eyes bold and shiny as he led in the runaway elephant, tame now as a kitten. Black Diamond had gone on a rampage at his first street parade, panicked by a baby carriage. In his wild flight, he had knocked over trees and hydrants, wrecked a horse car and put to rout the local fire department, sent out to capture him. Undoubtedly he would have been shot had not Otto, appearing out of nowhere, calmed him down, and led him in without aid of elephant hook or hood.

It was a case of love at first sight, a not uncommon thing among elephants, and the circus, recognizing this, had hired Otto on the spot as the intractable animal's keeper. It was something like that for Linda, too, though she did not admit this, being married at the time. But when, a few years later, her acrobat husband fell to violent death, she at once set her cap for the elephant man, whose ungainly bulk and childlike ways both fascinated her and aroused her strongly maternal instincts.

Linda was as determined as she was pretty and there would have been no trouble about the matter except for Black Diamond. He was a one-man elephant and would obey Otto implicitly, but he would have killed anyone else that tried to command him. Jealous and demanding, he would share Otto with no one. Once when the keeper had fed peanuts to another elephant, Black Diamond had seized him with his trunk and held him on high, and Otto was the closest he had ever been to death at that moment. The bull had set him down gently, however, chirruping his apologies and caressing him with the sensitive finger and thumb of his trunk, but never again did Otto dare show attention to any living creature within sight of his charge's shifty eyes.

The towering elephant was the circus' premier attraction, so Otto became through force of circumstances a vital and important member of the troupe. But between the demanding elephant and the purposeful girl, he was as helpless and bewildered as a puppy being fought over by two children.

* * * * *

CIRCUS people sleep late and it was the middle of the following morning when Linda arrived at the big dining tent for her

coffee. She took her place at the long table opposite Chilly Billy and Poodles, who were looking a bit seedy after a night's tour of the hot spots offered by the thriving Western town. News spreads fast in the circus and the two clowns knew all about Black Diamond.

"When an elephant gets sick he gets sick all over," Poodles was saying. He looked sideways at his tall and skinny companion and winked out of bloodshot eyes, his wide clown's mouth spreading in a grin which showed the handsome gold fillings. "I wouldn't wonder but what Black Diamond would turn into a pink elephant."

"Better'n Barnum's white elephant," said Chilly. He was fond of Linda but he liked to see her bridle up. "Now supposin' we had a pink elephant in the circus, Red, and you was to ride him in the parade—"

"It wouldn't be the first one you two saw," Linda snapped, and there was a general guffaw down the table. The two friendly clowns were the circus' fast company.

Someone came through the door and stumbled over a tent pin. Poodles was glad of the diversion and helped the man up.

"Ain't you going to say good morning to me and the lady," said Chilly. "We were just talking about your elephant—"

He stopped suddenly and exchanged glances with Linda, who was rubbing the palms of her hands with a tiny handkerchief, a habit acquired from many hot summers in the ring.

"I don't think he can see us, Chilly," she said in a low voice. "Look at his eyes."

But Otto's eyes couldn't be seen except for a red slit showing between swollen lids. He slumped down clumsily at the table opposite the girl.

"I'll get you some breakfast, Otto honey," she said.

He looked up at the voice and rumbled crossly, "Don't want a thing to eat. Just cupacoffee. Got to get over to elephant quarters."

Linda motioned Chilly outside. The ungainly clown was serious now and all solicitude. He knew what had happened all right and he was with Linda on it. They had been troopers together for years.

"You get him to the doctor quick, Chilly," she said. "Before people see him. Then get him to bed. I've got other business."

"Count on me, Red," he replied, and ducking his head went back through the tent door.

An unwilling vet found himself being dragged away from the cozy medicine tent where he was enjoying his morning cigar and propelled by the determined little redhead to the elephant quarters. Black Diamond was worse. He was lying down now, his two short hind legs bent like knees and doubled behind him, his body trembling with fever and his eyes so puffed up that Sam could barely pry them open. And he didn't like what he saw within.

"He's a sick elephant all right," said the vet. "Looks like the infection got in the eye structure. I'll give him a shot of bacterin, but I dunno."

Panic came to Linda but it didn't show. Only the small handkerchief was working the inside of her hands and it was real sweat now.

"Suppose it doesn't get better," she said. "Suppose it gets worse. What'll happen to Ott—to Black Diamond then?"

THE vet was thinking the same thing. He was trying to cover it up and he wasn't good at it. He fumbled in his pocket for a plug and finally got it out and wrenched off a mouthful.

"This here bacterin ought to help," he said, kneeling down beside his satchel.

"You answer my question, Sam Harris," said Linda, stamping her foot. "You tell me the truth. If you don't, I'll put a hex on you and your animals and don't think I don't know how."

The color drained out of the vet's face and his lower jaw sagged.

"I'll tell you all I know, Linda," he quavered. "But don't you start nothing on an old friend like me." He took out his medicines with trembling hands. "The truth is the elephant can't see. He ain't blind yet but he will be in another twelve hours if this bacterin don't take hold."

"Suppose he does go blind," said Linda. "'ll they kill him!"

"Have to," said Sam.

Black Diamond never winced as the vet

jabbed the needle three inches into his hide. Linda forced her voice to be conversational.

"How do they go about killing a great hulk like an elephant?" she asked, resting a dainty foot on the bulging side.

Now that the talk had turned professional, Sam was getting back his composure.

"Well, sometimes they make a double slip noose around their neck with a rope and have two good elephants pull them tight. Sometimes they shoot them, but it takes a lot of shooting. Or an orange or apple with poison in it—cyanide of potassium—will finish them off quiet like. Even a sick elephant will eat an orange."

Linda was thinking hard. She was working hard at her hands with her ball of a handkerchief.

"That cross-eyed towner, Sam, did he look like this?"

She contorted her mouth and screwed up her eyes into a frightful imitation of a cross-eyed redhead. The superstitious vet backed away in horror.

"For God's sake, Linda," he said. "For God's sake."

He spat through his fingers.

"Spitting won't do you any good, Sam. But I'll cross it out for you if you'll do what I say. The bad luck is in that elephant, Sam. It's spreading to Otto and it'll spread to you and me if we don't do something quick."

She came close to him and spoke in a low voice. The vet shook his head and made off in long strides. Then he started to run. Linda followed, her delicate face formidable and grim with unladylike determination.

TOSSING in her bed in the circus sleeping car that night, Linda dreamed of her farm in Vermont and of Otto and of elephants. Otto had Black Diamond hitched to the plow and they were wallowing through a muddy field. Linda was following along trying to give the elephant an orange but she could never quite catch up to him because her feet were stuck in the mud. Otto was whipping the elephant and shouting to him to go faster. Then the shouts changed to screams and groans and suddenly she was awake and the screams and groans were real and coming along the platform just outside her car.

As she tumbled out of the train in dressing gown and red slippers, a stretcher was being hoisted into the hospital car. Crowding around it, in various states of undress, was a curious and sympathetic crowd of circus men and women, getting in each other's way in their desire to help. The tall form of Chilly Billy was waving them away from the car and he was shooting profane orders to get the hell out of here and go back to bed. Then Linda was standing beside the table on which Otto now lay writhing.

His skin was blue and he was doubled up with pain and rolling from side to side. Nevertheless he recognized Linda and in a thick guttural whisper he gasped,

"Black Diamond—get—Sam—quick."

The circus doctor, a tall cadaverous man with a black handlebar mustache, dressed only in a long white nightgown, shook his head.

"Off his bean," he said. He pried open Otto's mouth and viewed the purple swollen tongue.

"Must have et something bad. I'd say he'd took poison, only how would he get the stuff?"

He looked at Linda lugubriously.

"He's likely to die. Right here in this car. And we haven't got any proper arrangements for corpses. If you was to step out, lady, we might have a try at the stomach pump."

Chilly Billy was looking hard at Linda. Now he spoke to the doctor.

"He hasn't had any poison and he hasn't eaten anything bad. He hasn't eaten at all. He's been right in my bunk all day. He'll live all right—if the elephant lives."

He turned to Linda.

"You know what I mean, Red. Now you get going."

Linda got going. Her wiry form knocked the galaxy of freaks, clowns, acrobats and hangers on right and left as she catapulted out of the train and down the railroad siding.

Over at the elephant tent a sleepy and protesting vet, arrayed in a dirty dressing gown of faded colors and a black derby, driven by the lashing energy of a small red-headed dynamo, administered to a very sick elephant. Black Diamond lay on his side now, groaning in pain, and the other elephants were wide awake and loudly trumpeting their concern for him.

"There's no more cyanide left in him," said Sam finally. "His heart is beating like a bass drum and he'll probably live another sixty years."

He looked at Linda sourly.

"That is, if you leave him be."

Even as he spoke Black Diamond's groans changed to thunderous snores. The whole herd quieted and trunks curled up, as one by one the elephants went to sleep.

"They know," said Sam. "It beats hell but they know all about it. They know that Black Diamond is all right now. Like as not they know what was the matter with him, and who done it. You better get out of here and stay out."

As Linda scurried past the hospital car on her way back the loud snoring that issued therefrom told her all she wanted to know.

"Might as well marry the elephant and be done with it," she said wearily as she climbed into bed. "Maybe I'm a sucker I didn't let the both of them die."

The harassed veterinarian was packing up his medicines and instruments next morning when the unwelcome Linda invaded the privacy of his tent to inquire about Black Diamond.

"Damned if he ain't well," said Sam. Linda noticed he had on a clean celluloid collar, a ceremony usually reserved for Sunday. "Eating hay by the hundred pound. Eyes all right, too. Looks like cyanide was just what he needed for pink eye."

"I knew it would be so," said Linda. "I saw Otto this morning. His pink eye's gone, too."

Sam crossed himself.

"You suppose them two," he whispered hoarsely, "is transfiguratin' each other or something? Maybe, now, this here Black Diamond is really Otto and the elephant is sleeping back there in the hospital car."

Linda stamped a small foot.

"You old fool," she said, eyes blazing, "Don't you go starting any such rumors around here. If you do, I'll tell everyone you poisoned Black Diamond. Now you keep your mouth shut."

But Sam didn't need any urging.

"I ain't saying a word, Linda. I'm getting out of here. I'm going to the treasury wagon and I'm leaving the circus for good. You just forget about old Sam Harris."

The vet gathered up his suitcase and stowed several paper parcels in his pockets.

"Just you keep that elephant well, Linda," he said, edging around her and out the opening of his tent. "Maybe, you take good care of him he'll live to be a hundred and Otto will too."

* * * * *

BUT Black Diamond didn't live to be a hundred. As the morning wore on he began to miss his keeper, now closely confined to bed by the strong-willed Linda. A cage boy came by with a pail of mash and the elephant knocked it out of his hands with a powerful blow of his trunk. The boy backed away with uncomplimentary remarks and Black Diamond crushed the pail with a tap of his forefoot and gobbled up the mess from the floor. Rapidly gaining in strength and irascibility, he strained from time to time against his picket stake, flailed his neighbors with his trunk and soon had the whole elephant line in a state of nerves. A variation of trumpeting, squalling, gusting of breath, whines and rumbles emanated from the whole herd, with Black Diamond leading the chorus.

In his bunk in the hospital car Otto was likewise behaving badly. Linda came in with a bowl of hot broth which he clumsily knocked from her hands. Then, without apology, he turned his back on her and faced the wall. When Linda sat on the edge of the bunk and patted his shoulder he only rumbled and moved closer to the wall. The girl's mood swiftly changing from solicitude to anger, she stuck out her tongue at the sulky form and left, curtly instructing Sambo, the colored porter, to clean up the mess on the floor and take good care that Otto did not get up.

* * * * *

IT WAS shortly before the afternoon performance, when the early customers were starting to drift into the sideshows, that it happened. Linda was in the horse tent rubbing down her white stallion when the cry came.

"Elephant loose!"

Then everybody was running.

An ominous black form, bellowing and screaming, was tearing across the tent-spattered field with the speed and undeviating course of a locomotive. It mowed down a

cook tent that stood in its way, leaving a tangle of ropes and burning canvas, engulfed a sideshow barker in the wreckage of his platform trappings and sent the frightened towners scurrying and diving for cover as it crossed the midway. Narrowly missing a group of children gathered about a gas balloon hawker on the outskirts of the circus proper, the flailing trunk caught the hawker in midriff and hurled him twenty feet through the air. But the colored balloons, festooned about the elephant's head, went with him on his wild flight, their occasional explosions adding to his panic and his rage.

Out of nowhere appeared all manner of circus people—tent men, cage boys, animal trainers, riders and clowns, armed with whatever came handy, from pitchforks to brooms, in aimless pursuit of the runaway. As they disappeared from the lot, there was a moment of silence and stillness and the circus grounds appeared to be deserted. Then the barkers mounted their platforms, the concessionaires resumed their staccato cries, the midway became populous with towners emerging from their places of refuge, and the circus was itself again.

Someone cranked up the circus Ford and Linda ran toward it, thinking to join in the chase. Then the awful thought struck her. Abruptly she turned back to the horse tent, bridled her white stallion, and raced bareback across the lot in the direction of Otto and the circus train.

But it was too late. Even as she clattered down the wooden siding she knew it was too late. Draped on the steps of the hospital car, one foot caught in the railing and body sprawled head downward, his morning cigar still in his mouth but crushed against his face, was a frightened and stunned Negro, a huge and growing egg on his forehead. All he could do was point, as he struggled to get free, in the direction that Otto had gone.

* * * * *

A RAMPAGING elephant never goes around anything. He goes through whatever gets in his way. Black Diamond, leaving behind him a wide arc of destruction through the center of town, had come to grief in the freight yard. Two tracks, crowded with cars loaded with ore, met in a V, and where they came together there was a small aperture. Into this triangle charged Black Diamond and, sensing the point of weakness, hurled himself at it. There was a crashing sound of metal on metal and grinding wheels. The heavy cars quivered and opened enough to let in the battering head. Then they closed upon it like a vice. Black Diamond was caught like a gigantic mouse in a trap.

A crowd of townspeople and circus folk with their futile weapons started to gather at a respectful distance to his rear. Black Diamond, trumpeting, bellowing and squalling, was engaged in a titanic effort to pull himself free.

Rump almost touching the ground, his six-ton body heaved and hauled backward on the leverage of his short and powerful legs. But he was weak from his sickness and his run and the iron vice held fast.

Two men armed with rifles came running. They were in shirt sleeves and suspenders and one wore a glittering sheriff's badge.

"Right behind the shoulder, Jake," shouted the sheriff, breathing heavily. "You take one side and I'll take t'other."

They advanced cautiously on either side of the elephant, keeping close to the cover of the cars. The sheriff knelt to take aim. Then the lightning struck. A white horse with screaming rider clattered into the triangle at runaway speed. The spectators scattered like chaff and the horse bore down with deadly directness on the kneeling man. Dropping his rifle, he rolled under the freight car with a frightened "Jesus!" just in time to escape the devastating hoofs. The horse whirled and reared with the agility of a polo pony; then smashed down on the abandoned rifle, battering it into matchwood.

On the other side of the elephant, the sheriff's deputy, unaware of his chief's discomfiture, took deliberate aim and fired. It was a lucky shot and the heavy Springfield bullet pierced the elephant's heart. For a moment he quivered and then, every nerve and muscle relaxing, his head slipped free of the deadly apex and he sat back on his haunches in a puzzled way. A colored balloon, miraculously preserved, bobbed incongruously about the great head. Then the mountainous form rolled gently over on its side, one front foot pointing skyward, the

trunk curled and uncurled once and Black Diamond moved no more.

The circus people rushed forward to pull Linda away from the dead elephant. Her disheveled red hair streaming over her tear-streaked face, she was sobbing and stroking the blue-black head. Above her stood the tall white stallion, his neck stretched down until his muzzle touched her as if to share in her grief. It was a tableau worthy of the circus, had the spectators been there to see.

"They've killed Otto. Oh, they've killed my Otto," she wailed.

But she came away with her friends because Linda was a trouper, and the show had to go on.

THE show went on, but it was not the same. The performers went through their acts mechanically, without the dash and verve they usually displayed when there was a crowded tent. Everyone was afraid of where the jinx might strike next, for that there was a jinx abroad no one doubted. Otto was at the bottom of it. Otto and Black Diamond. The elephant had pink eye, Otto had pink eye. The elephant was poisoned, Otto was poisoned. Then they both miraculously recovered. Now the elephant had gone on a rampage and had been killed and Otto was missing.

It was well known that jinxes go by threes, but here was a sort of doubleheaded jinx and there was no precedent for it. Until Otto or his body appeared no one knew what might happen.

But Linda knew. She could tell to the minute when Otto had been killed. He had been shot, of course, the moment the bullet had entered Black Diamond's heart. Somewhere his great hulking body was lying in an alley, bathed in his heart's blood.

Well, there was one thing they would not do to him. They would not skin him and stuff him and put him in a museum as they were undoubtedly starting to do at this moment with Black Diamond. Linda would see to that. She would go out and find Otto and take his body to her farm in Vermont and bury it under one of the great maple trees. Her determined little chin quivered. It would be hard to leave the circus, but it had nothing left for her now.

She was walking down the almost deserted midway with Chilly Billy, whose face was still streaked with the remnants of its gaudy clown's coloring. It was here, a decade ago, that she had first seen Otto as he triumphantly brought in the great wild elephant. Chilly Billy had been with her then and she was glad now of his faithful company in her time of grief.

The circus band struck up its last tune. It was always the same one—"Tenting Tonight on the Old Camp Grounds." Otto and Black Diamond had seemed to be walking in time to it on that other day so long ago.

"You've got to eat first, Red," Chilly was saying. "We'll get just a bite of supper and then we'll go find him if it takes all night."

There was a stir down at the end of the midway. Stragglers coming out of the sideshows paused and gaped curiously. It seemed to be a little procession, three men followed by a crowd of urchins. The men on the outside wore gleaming saucers on their chests, and the one in the middle had his hands handcuffed behind him. His clothes were in shreds and one sleeve had been torn off at the armpit. There was a gash on his forehead and dried blood covered his face and the exposed parts of his body.

As the trio approached, Linda and the clown, the orchestra was playing the last strains of "Tenting Tonight." She rubbed her eyes and leaned on Chilly. She must be dreaming. Here was Otto, but it was not the Otto she had known the day before. It was Otto of ten years ago. He was a badly beat up man, but he was a man all right. The stoop and the shuffle were gone. He was stepping right out and walking big and cocky and triumphant, as he had that first day, and his eyes were bold and shiny. Linda almost expected to see the elephant behind him, but there was only the crowd of small boys.

"This here hombre says he belongs to the circus," one of the sheriffs began. "And he's looking for the lady that rides the white horse. Be you she?"

Linda was suddenly soft and warm and she felt all trembly inside.

"Why, Otto, honey," she said. "Why, Otto, you've come back."

He was straining at the handcuffs and the vivid picture came back to Linda—

the picture of Black Diamond struggling to free himself from his cruel trap as the two men with rifles sneaked up on him.

"You let him free, you two. He belongs to me." Her voice was rising to a scream as she advanced menacingly on the sheriffs.

Chilly Billy hastily stepped in front of her.

"Easy, Red. Don't get going now. Let me talk to these gentlemen."

"Regular little spitfire, ain't she?" said one of the sheriffs amiably. "Well, she can have him. We want to get rid of him. We want to get rid of him bad, before he starts cutting up again."

"He ain't done nothin' yet," said the other. "Only cleaned out a couple of tough joints, and smashed some store windows and broke the heads of some gamblers and stole a horse'n buggy and broke out of jail twicet."

He grinned at Otto admiringly.

"If someone will pay for the damage he done and get him out of town before he does some real harm, we'll be truly grateful."

"I'll pay for the damage," said Linda. She was going limp again. "And he's leaving town tonight, that is if—if—"

Her chin started to quiver and she looked at Otto. He spoke for the first time.

"I know about Black Diamond," he said. His voice was clear and strong. "I'm a free man now. And I don't belong to anybody."

He bent over the tiny redhead and looked deep into her eyes.

"We're getting married tonight," he said, "And we're going to Vermont. As soon as I get rid of these bracelets, I'll show you who belongs to who."

She was a little afraid of what she saw, but she loved it. Taking the key from the grinning sheriff she unlocked the handcuffs.

The Nixie's Pool

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

GO NOT to the Nixie's pool!
In those waters dim and cool
Gleams a pale and lovely face
Framed in hair like green fern-lace,
Arms of more than mortal grace
Smooth as lily, and as cool.

By all that's holy, all that's good,
Shun the hollow in the wood
Where the giant beech-trees grow
And the water-lilies glow,
And the rushes, parting, show
Wet limbs white as birchwood.

Knight-at-arms with blazoned shield,
Plough-boy homing from the field,
Never heed what you may hear:
Song that rises wild and clear
From the little hidden mere,
Like bird in no man's field.

If you harken, if you follow
To her water-haunted hollow,
Bid farewell to tilting-ground,
Plodding ox or faithful hound!—
Deep in Faery you'll be bound
With the Nixie of the hollow.

Weird Tales

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STAY TUNED FOR TERROR

This programme is adapted by ROBERT BLOCH from his stories which have appeared in WEIRD TALES, the narrator being Craig Dennis.

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~★~

And remember to . . . .

Stay Tuned for Terror!

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

Rain, Rain, Go Away!

For the smell of rain was a stench in his nostrils, reminding him of death

ANTON MARKOV stood at the window, looking out into the dull gray gloom of the day. It was going to rain. He pulled the shade down quickly, fearing that he might see the first splattering of the drops against the sidewalk below. Anton shuddered spasmodically. He was afraid of rain, deathly afraid.

He knew there was no reason for his fear; no sane reason that is. It has always been with him, even when he was a small child going to school. Often had he cowered in the shelter of a doorway as a grayish wetness flooded down from above, spending its fury in bouncing water on glistening flagging; eyes closed, afraid to look, afraid the rain might touch him. His obsession sat like an evil witch astride his thin shoulders, haunting him. The smell of rain, that the others he knew liked so much, was a stench in his nostrils, reminding him of death. The coolness after the storm was to him the lifting of a nameless dread that had squeezed his heart and frozen his muscles all during the downpour.

He was mocked and misunderstood in school. Now that he understood a little better the inborn cruelty of children, he was content. But in those days it had been an added torment. Their shrill voices put lines in his pallid face, and twisted the corners of his thin mouth into sullen things.

He never told anyone about the dream. There was no close friend with a willing ear and a soothing tongue—

His hands were shaking. He patted his

By GARDNER F. FOX

black, soiled tie with moist palms. Then he put them on his coat and rubbed them dry, and slipped them into his pockets Anton looked around the room. He must find something to do. He could not stand here during the storm that was coming, and he did not want to get into bed and pull the covers over his head and lie there shivering as with an ague.

Books on the littered desk he lifted and rearranged and finally put down. His tongue slipped out to moisten his lips. Something to do, something to do. Yes, he would find something to occupy the time when that stuff would come pouring down, drenching everything, casting a damp pall over the city.

He looked at his wristwatch. Ten minutes past three on a Saturday afternoon. No work until Monday. And it was going to rain.

"Damn!" he whispered. "Oh, damn! Why can't I be normal?"

Anton thought of Evans Carrel who worked with him, and of Betty Stokes, wondering what they'd say if they could see him hiding here from falling water.

"But it isn't just falling water," he lashed out with hysteria lurking in the words. "It's more than that. I know it is, I know it. But I can't prove it. I don't know what it is. My dream doesn't go that far!"

The dream. He could see the frogs being beaten by needle-thin bamboo rods, their fishbelly white throats bulging in their croaking agony while the thin rods dug into them. And after that beating the clap of thunder, and the deluge when the heavens opened like bombbay doors and the water came down.

Always he lay on his back, watching that water coming toward him, never quite touching him in his dream. That was what added to his torment. His dream took him just so far, and never any further.

He sat in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"What happens after that? Why doesn't the rain ever reach me?" he muttered thickly. "If only it would, just once! Then I might walk bareheaded in real rain, and not be frightened by it!"

Why doesn't it rain?

He looked up at the ceiling and cried, "Get it over with! Get done with it. Then I can relax. Let me alone, alone!"

With trembling hands, he rubbed his face. He said softly, "This won't do. I can't sit here and wait. Wait. Wait! I can't do it."

HE opened a closet door and took out a bottle and held it to the light. Empty at a time like this. A drink or two might snap him out of his fog. At least, it would help him lie in a hazy coma on the bed. Then let it rain all it wanted. He wouldn't care not with a few drinks in him. But the bottle was empty. He dropped it into the wastebasket and stood staring down at it.

Anton dropped into the chair again and pulled paper and a pen toward him. But when the gold point of the pen touched the paper, it scratched and made a blue splash of ink. He couldn't even write a letter!

He shuddered, standing up so abruptly the chair clattered over behind him. He let it lie.

"I'm going out," he said through stiff lips, "and buy a bottle and hurry back. I've got to. I can't stand it, today. Some days it isn't this bad, but I need a drink today. A lot of drinks."

He talked to himself, shivering as he put on a dark brown sweater, and his black coat over it. He ran down the steps and into the street.

It won't rain before I come back, he thought. It can't play a trick like that, he whispered, knowing all the time how treacherous this rain was with its soft touch that was so much like a caress, yet evil as a witch's brew. Many the time he had thought to elude it, and it tricked him; but once in a while he tricked the rain, and deep inside him a flame of joy and triumph flared into life. Those moments made his daring possible. If the rain won all the time, he would want to kill himself.

The store was not far. He could see the red neon signs blazing in the window, making the bottles glimmer. A faint red haze of light fell on the sidewalk. The liquor store window seemed a little friendlier with those crimson neons blazing like beacons.

He dodged around the big gray roadster parked in front of the store, and went in.

There was a man in the store, vaguely

familiar; the big shoulders in the tan camel's-hair coat, the blue jowls jutting from under the wide mouth, the hearty voice. The man turned as Anton closed the door.

"Anton! I'll be damned. You live around here?"

"Hello, Evans. What are you doing in my neighborhood?"

"Stopped by with Betty Stokes. We're going over to my diggings, for a snort or two during the storm."

Anton looked back at the sullen gray day through the plate glass window. He pulled his coat a little tighter around him.

"Yes," he said nervously. "A storm *is* brewing. I'd better hurry—before it breaks, you know. Don't like to get caught out in the—the rain."

Evans Carrel nodded, watching the clerk wrap his bottle. He swung around suddenly, crying, "Why not come with us, Tony? Up to my place. Hey? What say?"

"No, no. I couldn't think of it," Anton said with an apologetic smile. He could not let Evans and Betty see him in the blue funk the rain caused. He looked at Evans shyly, taking in his big, capable hands and the grim face that was lightened a little by a smiling mouth. He envied him his strength, suddenly. Anton looked at the clerk.

"A bottle of rye, please. Any kind. No, just a pint."

Tucking his purchase under his arm, Evans grinned at him.

"Sure you won't join us? In this case, three is company. Honest, old man, we'd both love to have you. Why not come along?"

THE idea nearly tempted Anton. It made him glow inside with friendliness, with appreciation of this gesture. Perhaps it would work out all right. He might forget the rain with company. He thought, I wish I owned the courage to go with them, to share their talk and laughter, maybe in front of a big red-brick fireplace. To let the trickle of amber liquor go down his throat, warming the guts of a man, making him mellow and talkative. Perhaps it would make him forget the storm. Yet it never had in the past, when he had tried being with others. No, he'd better not. Not today. Not while the clouds were so black, the sky so brooding.

"Sorry. Maybe some other time. Is that all right, Evans?"

"Why sure, if you say so. I thought—well, okay. So long."

Evans Carrel waved his hand, watching little Markov flash out the door, scurry across the gray street, run down the sidewalk.

"Funny codger," he muttered. "Can't understand him. Seems to be afraid, sometimes. Looks as though he expected a hobgoblin to jump up and make off with him."

HE SIGHED and went out to the car where Betty Stokes was making up her red mouth with lipstick, peering into the mirror she held in her hand, her lips pursed a little. She turned and looked at him, seeing his frown.

"I saw Anton in the store. I've been wondering about him."

"He's afraid of the rain," she told him, snapping her compact shut and putting it in her handbag.

"The rain?" asked Evans blankly. "I've heard of guys being scared of lightning or loud thunder. Sort of childhood fixation. But rain!"

He drove through traffic with practised ease. He looked sideways at the girl.

"How do you know about it? I always thought he was a secretive guy. Never says much to me. That is, nothing about his personal life."

"Oh, it was on a day like this. We got caught together in a regular downpour. We ducked into a doorway. He was shivering fit to kill. I thought he was sick. Then I saw his eyes. All white, they were. They rolled a little. His face was pale as new laundry."

Her shoulders shook. She burrowed down into the upholstery, closer to his warm side. She said, "I was sure scared. I thought he was having a fit. But he managed to tell me rain frightened him heaps. Something about a dream he'd had ever since he was a boy, or some such thing."

"Mmm. Dreams."

Evans Carrel drove through the night, his thoughts churning to the back-and-forth swish of the windshield wiper that cast splashing drops from the glass, flinging them aside in a frenzy of motion.

THE next Monday, Anton felt Evans' dark eyes fastening on him from time to time. When he would glance up, the big man always moved his eyes away. Finally he came and stood near Anton's desk.

"Say, Tony. I don't mean to pry, but—well, what I'm trying to get at is—ah, the rain. You and rain, I mean. You're afraid of it, aren't you?"

Anton felt a hand tighten on his stomach, knotting it. His lips went stiff, and the blood began to pump in his veins. Fear of ridicule made him say, "I don't see what business it is of yours, Evans. That is, if I am, it's my affair."

The big man's mouth drooped contritely. He managed a grin, shuffling his feet a little.

"I don't blame you, Anton. It isn't any of my business. But I was wondering if I could help you. I'd like to help you, Tony. I mean, you're a nice guy. I like you."

Anton felt the hot surge of friendliness coming up within him. He flushed a bit on his pallid cheeks, ashamed.

"Sorry, Evans. This inhibition has been with me so long that I've grown used to it, but no one ever talked to me about it. Years ago in school, kids used to make fun of me. I guess you can understand that."

"Sure can!" exclaimed Carrel heartily. "Frankly, I'm the sort of fellow who would have made fun of you, too, when I was a kid. I'm what you call an extrovert. Lots of laughter and parties, always showing the way I felt. But not now. The years make a difference. Make a man smarter. Teach him things."

He perched on the edge of the desk, swinging a pointed tan shoe. His wool stockings were ribbed, and his gray trousers were carefully creased.

"Look, Tony. What I'm driving at is this. I used to teach psychology in a jerkwater college you've never heard of. I even wrote a book on applied psychology. Even had it published before I caught wise that I'd never make a fortune that way. I took up the selling game instead, and the psych I know comes in handy.

"Suppose I were to cure you of your fear, Tony? I'd use applied psychology, and I know enough to make it safe. We'd examine that dream of yours under hypnosis, and bring it to the fore. Talk about it. Find out what makes it come. Once you know that, the cure is easy."

Anton opened his eyes wide.

"Do you think it will work? Is it that simple?"

"Sure. Get at the subconscious. Find out what quirk in your past makes you dream. Fear is just a glandular reaction to a stimulus. Babies are born with only two fears, that of loud noise and of falling. Think how many other fears we acquire in life! And there's a reason for it, too. Earlier experiences teach us to beware of mad dogs, of a maniac with a gun, and so on. Somewhere along the line, you got that fear of rain. We have to learn what that was."

Anton looked at his hands and shuddered. In the dream, those hands were tied, and rain was coming toward him. Yet it never touched him. Always the dream stopped at a certain point. It never went any further.

He looked up, saying, "But my dream has nothing to do with normal life, Evans. It's something fantastic, utterly unbelievable, as though an ancestral recollection was stuck in the memory passages of my brain and couldn't get where it belongs. I think I am reliving something that happened to a forebear of mine."

"All right. So much the better. Then it can't possibly affect you!"

He slapped Anton on the shoulder encouragingly.

ANTON moved through his duties that day and the next with a flicker of hope burning brightly inside him. He went to the movies at night, and even felt so good that he went to a dancehall and spent three hours dancing with a pretty redhead.

"Evans'll cure me, all right," he told himself, walking home in the dark, cool night, hands in his pockets, heels tapping boldly on the sidewalk. "A man like Evans Carrel knows what he's doing. A professor of psychology. Who would have thought it?"

The days came and went. Late one afternoon Evans stopped at his desk.

"I'm going to leave the day and the time to you, Tony. Betty would like to be in on it, though. She's interested in this sort of thing."

"I don't mind," Anton said quickly.

"She has a cousin that works in a museum. She said he put her wise to a lot of superstitions about rain. She got me interested and I studied up myself."

"Study rain?" Anton was amazed.

"Say, you mean to tell me you've been fighting this thing all your life and you never thought of reading up about it?"

Anton lowered his head, shaking it. Now that Evans mentioned it, the thought numbed him. Why hadn't he done that? Even a moron would have had sense enough to do that! He looked up embarrassedly, asking, "What did you find out?"

Evans pushed his lower lip forward, frowning.

"Frankly, I didn't know there was so much on the subject. Rainworship and all that sort of thing. Rain-belts. Rain-stones. Sacrifices to the rain gods. There's something about it in all types of legends: Mexican, Greek, Eddic, Indian."

Anton stared.

"Look," said Evans. "What I'm going to suggest may sound drastic, but I'd like to arrange a little drama. You say you think you are a sacrifice in your dream? Good. Then suppose we stage that sacrifice in reality. Try to summon rain, to show you it's all hocus-pocus and no earthly use at all."

"Can you do that?"

"As well as I know how. Betty is going to help me. She's uncovered a lot of stuff, too. About frogs—"

"They beat them with little rods," whispered Anton through suddenly bloodless lips. "They kill them by whipping them to death. It's horrible to hear them screeching in my dreams."

EVANS looked uncomfortable, moving his neck inside his shirt-collar, and rubbing his hands together.

"Yeah, I know. But your dreams have to be duplicated. I'm going to have real live frogs there for a sacrifice. It isn't pleasant I know, but we have to be exact."

Anton put a hand on his arm. "Evans, you don't have to go through with this. You aren't the type of man who would whip frogs and take any interest in it. Let's forget the whole thing."

"Not on your life. I'm going to cure you if it takes every frog in the county. You're going to be well or I'll know the reason why!"

THE following Saturday was one of those May days when the sky hangs pale blue and bright over a blooming Earth, when the air is warm with sunlight and fragrant with the perfumes of new flowers. Birds carolled in tree-branches above his head as Anton walked to the office passing a street peddler slowly pacing behind a creaking pushcart, singing softly to himself. Sunlight slipped through the ties in the elevated to warm Anton through his coat, flooding him with strength.

"This is the day," he said when he saw Evans.

He finished his work early, using his restlessness as energy. He went down the hall near a window and smoked two cigarettes, one after the other, while he stared out over the city. He thought jubilantly, this is the day! Tomorrow I will be a free man.

"Hey," yelped Betty, tugging on his arm. "Come out of it. You've been here an hour. We've looked all over for you."

They would not hear his apologies, but each took an arm and tugged him with them toward the elevator. He caught a drift of perfume from Betty's maroon sweater, and the faint scent of tobacco from Evans' tweed jacket. Anton had never before thought of the pleasure in being alive and normal, of the smells and the tastes and the sights there were to enjoy.

He slipped easily into their riotous mood.

In Evans' big gray roadster he sat with an arm around Betty. Once he slid his eyes sideways at her, liking the clear white smoothness of her cheeks, the long lashes framing her cool gray eyes. Why, if Evans were right, if he did manage to cure him, he could find a girl like Betty for himself. Then the four of them could take long rides together. He had money saved up; he had never had any way to spend it, before. Always the rain discouraged him.

"It'll be a totally different life," he told them eagerly, his face coming alive, losing a little of its pallor and the lines etched in it by constant fright. "We'll go on picnics, and to the beach. Maybe Evans can even give me exercises to do so's I'll have muscles, too."

Betty patted his hands, smiling at him.

"You'll be a new man, Tony. You wait. Evans has gone to a lot of fuss—"

"I know. I want to repay him, somehow!"

"Forget it," grinned Evans. "I'm curious about your taste in girls. I want to see you on a dance floor. That's why I'm doing it."

They laughed and the roads went by, and the car took corners and slid powerfully along a highway.

The engine sputtered and died in sight of a low white cottage that had rows of purple irises along one wall. A slatestone terrace lay behind the cottage, giving the appearance of a flat sea-anchor to the trim house. Blue shutters and a blue door with brightly gleaming brass knocker and doorknob added gaiety to the white front.

"Doggone," muttered Evans with a rueful chuckle, working the choke and starter. "All week I've been meaning to have this fixed. Now of all days it acts up."

"There's the cottage, Evans," said Betty. "It doesn't make any difference. We're practically in front of it."

Evans said, "I'll have a mechanic come and pick it up," as he got out of the car and led them toward the house. Jiggling a keyring, he unlocked the door and threw it open.

"Come on in and I'll rustle up a drink."

ANTON came to a dead stop in the doorway of the living-room, two steps above it. The furniture had been removed. On the bare boards of the waxed floor were scattered grains of sand, mixed with fibre rugs in exotic designs of red and black and yellow.

Against the walls leaned bamboo poles latched together with leather thongs. A table native to the South Seas stood in the center of the room. Triangular stones lay on its wooden top, blending their flat pallor with the red and purple hues of a long belt. A floorlamp and an easychair rested near the table.

Anton swung around in amazement at a grinning Evans.

"You—where'd you get all this stuff?"

"That cousin of Betty's. She convinced him that she needed it, so he let her borrow it."

Betty picked up the pointed stones and the red-purple belt.

"These are real rain-stones and rain-belt. They used to be part of rain ceremonials somewhere. I forgot the name of the place, though Jimmy told me."

"What'd I say?" asked Evans. "Said there was a lot of this stuff about rain you didn't know. Zeus is a rain-god in Greek mythology. God of the heavens, known as the 'cloud gatherer.' The expression 'Zeus rains' was a popular one. They had their rites on mountain tops to get nearer the home of the gods."

WHILE he talked, Evans went back and forth, from kitchen to living-room, carrying jars and buckets of earth, and pitchers filled with water.

"In Crete they worshipped on Mounts Ida and Dikte. In Thessaly, on Olympus. Then there's the Danaid legend where fifty dames are condemned to fill a bottomless pit with leaking pitchers for their sin of murder. They used those bottomless jars in their magic. To let the water soak from them into the earth. Sympathetic magic, you know. Imitating the real thing to induce it to happen."

"But—but do we want it to rain?" wondered Anton.

"Of course not. But I'm prepared for anything you can think of in that dream of yours. I want to duplicate it, to show you that the mumbo-jumbo your subconscious has thought up is so much hogwash!"

Betty pushed Anton into a chair, chuckling, "You sit down, Tony. Let Evans and I get everything ready. We want you to be completely at your ease."

Evans laughed, "He has the easiest job I ever heard of. All he has to do is fall asleep."

Anton felt the easychair clutch him. He leaned his head against the backrest. A feeling of ease flooded his veins and limbs. He was in the hands of friends who were ready to cure him. He smiled.

Evans turned on the big floodlamp as Betty pulled down the venetian blinds, and pinned strips of dark cloth across them. The room was dark, except for the single beam of whiteness glaring from the lamp, into his open eyes. Evans adjusted a fan across

the flat front of the lamp. He clicked something.

The beam of light winked as the fan slowly rotated, cutting off the glare, letting it slip through its openings in patterns of white after darkness. Dot and dash, dash and dot, light and darkness, darkness and light.

The alternation of white and black tired his eyes. Blinking them, he felt languorous, tired.

"Look up at the light, Tony. Let it get inside your head. Ah, that's it. Makes you sleepy, doesn't it?"

Anton nodded.

"Yes, you're tired, tired. So why not sleep. Sleep, sleep . . . you want to sleep, so why not? You are safe, here with us, where nothing can harm you, so sleep, sleep. . . ."

Blinky light. Murmuring voice. Slipping senses.

"Sleep, sleep, sleep. . . ."

Eyes closing, shutting out the world.

From a distance a dull voice muttered, "Sleep, sleep. . . ."

Then, nothingness.

NO, not quite nothingness. There was something here. He could see it flickering, as though he stood in a long tunnel. It was red, and it shot up toward a vast ceiling. Something was moving in front of the redness, and he found that he could see a bit clearer.

The redness shining in the night was a huge fire. He lay in a cave, and his legs and wrists were bound, and there was the sweat of terror on his forehead. From where he reclined on his side, with his face turned toward the entrance of the cave, he could see the serpent priestess dancing around the scarlet flames.

A greenish reptile twisted and writhed in her white arms. Flickering tongues of crimson mimicked it behind the priestess' dancing body. The supple twist of her long white legs, and the rippling of her upheld arms formed a sinuous pattern that blended with the writhings of the snake and the dancings of the flames. Everything was distorted, as the rain distorted vision. Even the music from the hide drums in the shadows lost rhythm, pounded and beat in eerie tempo. Behind the dancer, a row of young girls held their arms aloft and let them ripple up and down.

The priestess with the flowing black hair lifted one white foot after another, stepping as though on glowing coals, foot bent gracefully at the ankle: advancing, then retreating. In her long-nailed hands she held a purple jar, shaped like a gigantic raindrop. In the red glow of the firelight, three girls weaved toward her. They wore long, flowing robes: the first was clad in red, the second all in white. The third was garbed in blue, and the last came dressed in a spotted tunic, for she was the fog and the rain creeping and dripping among the branches and the leaves of trees.

In their hands the girls bore clumps of earth. From the purple, raindrop pitcher the priestess poured water that glistened like blood in the reflection of the fire. The water muddied the earth that the acolytes held in their palms, causing it to slop over and drop toward the ground.

Seeing that, the watcher in the cave writhed and bent in frantic efforts to escape. He knew what was coming; knew and dreaded it with all the horror that frightened his muscles and congealed his flesh. They would be approaching him, now; him and the girl who was to be the other sacrifice.

He saw them, big blobs of blackness mounting on slogging footsteps, coming up the path. Like silent shadows, they drew nearer, only the harsh breathing in their throats signalling their presence.

Hands closed on him, lifting. He shrieked, and his keening despair rang in the cave. In those hands he could not struggle. They were too powerful, too used to handling fright-maddened beings.

Toward the fire they bore him, and beyond it, where an altar of stained stone was set. Rusted chains clanked dismally as they were raised and bound about him. His rolling eyes saw the sky, dark and sullen.

To one side something white flashed: the girl. Her long, flaxen hair swam in the breeze. Her legs and arms were in supple motion, untiring in their frantic struggles. She was flung down beside him. He could hear the sob in her raw throat. Her naked shoulder shook against his.

Now the dancers were still, breathless. The priestess and her acolytes were showering the fire with water, making it hiss and splutter.

Soon the sacrifices would be left alone to the rain-god. Already the people were withdrawing on careful feet, stooping low. They cast frightened glances at the forms on the stone altar; he could see the whites of their eyes, and the quiver of shoulders when someone shuddered.

The fire was out. The priestess brought forward the frogs and laid them, bound with withes, across the altar. In her right hand she grasped a bundle of needle-like rods. Slowly she began to pound on the frogs. . . .

Aieeee! Aieeee!

The priestess screamed above the bellowing of the dying frogs. She lifted her face toward the sky and shrieked again.

Thunder rolled in sonorous waves across the brooding sky.

A jagged streak of whiteness rippled from the clouds, flashing the gloom into momentary day.

The rods were dyed in red, rising and falling, flipping gruesome drops across the altar. The frogs were still, now, and quiet.

A blast of thunder rocked the earth so that even the stone altar quaked! It was a stentorian blast of sheer power that deafened all who heard it.

The rain was coming down.

Anton screamed. . . .

ANTON opened his eyes.

A white witch stood in the shadows before him, behind a glowing fire, with a serpent twisted about her smooth shoulders. Her shadow reached to his feet, and in the lifting flame of the fire the priestess loomed enormous.

A hand tightened on his arm, keeping him frozen in his chair while it whispered, "It's Betty. Ssshh!"

The white woman was pouring water that glistened like blood in the red light of the fire onto parched earth in a bowl. To one side frogs were croaking where they lay tied across a stone altar.

"What is she doing?" croaked Anton.

"Duplicating your dream. She is doing everything the priestess did. You told us everything that happened. You answered questions I asked, about words and movements of the ritual."

"Oh. But my dream ended as it always did, didn't it? The rain never got to me. It didn't touch me. But I was afraid of it."

Evans scowled, whispering, "I don't know. Your dream did stop at that point. We want to see if anything will happen if we repeat the rite."

Anton looked at Betty, recognizing her in her in her outlandish costume. This was all kind of silly, he thought. When I'm awake, hard reality says this is nonsense. He was swiftly losing the stark fear that haunted his dream.

He chuckled, "I hope it works."

"Ssssh. Just watch."

Anton had to admit that Betty had learned her part well, listening to him gibber in his sleep. She even danced like that other priestess, with the same rippling beat to her arms and legs, and with the identical twisting sinuousity of torso. Now the parched earth was flooded with water, and she was placing the frogs across the altar.

She was whipping them, and the frogs were crying.

The rods were red. Anton found that his palms were aching where his fists were clenched so tightly that he was driving his fingernails into his palms. Across the fire, Betty fastened her fathomless eyes on him. She was saying something in the voice of the dream priestess. He remembered it now. It was the ritual saying that always preceeded her screams.

"Aieeee! Aieeee!"

Nothing happened. Cowering in his chair, unable to believe his own ears, Anton kept staring at Betty across the fire and licking his lips with a dry tongue.

No noise. No thunder.

No pounding of rain on roof or shingled walls.

Evans clicked the lights on. He stood grinning in a corner of the room. Betty was sweeping a robe about herself, brushing back a lock of her hair. Anton thought she looked a little dazed, but his eyes saw the stuffed serpent just then and he laughed.

"It's all over, it's all over," he babbled between peals of mirth. "And nothing happened. Nothing at all."

He ran to the windows and ripped away the shades, lifting the blinds. A burst of yellow sunlight beat in at him, warming face and arm and chest. Swinging around, he held out his arms.

He shouted, "I'm free! I'm free!"

Evans was pounding his back. Betty laughed and kissed his cheek, but kept her eyes carefully turned from his.

"You don't know what this means to me. You can't possibly realize, not possibly. Only a blind man given his sight could know. All my life. That dream! Never stopping. Afraid every moment that it was going to rain."

Evans poured cocktails, shouting gleefully. "This is a celebration that's going to be a celebration. What'll we do tonight, Tony? Can you get him a girl, Betty? How's about dancing somewhere? The treat's on me."

"Oh, no. On me!" crowed Anton, slapping his chest and taking the drink. "I'm going to spend some of that money I've been making. I want to enjoy it. I even," he flushed a little, "put a hundred dollars in my mattress, thinking that if I were cured, I'd want to celebrate with you."

They drank and talked. Anton looked at Betty and said, "You sounded just like the priestess. And those words you spoke before you yelled! Marvelous. Exact intonations and accent."

Evans chuckled, "Betty used to be in amateur theatricals."

Betty brushed a lock of hair again, moving her hand restlessly, as though she were trying to make up her mind to say something. Her eyes were big, and a little frightened.

"I—I didn't say those words. I mean, I don't remember. It was as though somebody else said them."

"Well, of course," shouted Evans. "You were acting your part so well, you lost all connection with your real identity. Every good actress has had moments like that."

Betty smiled, then laughed.

"I didn't think of that. Aren't I silly?"

"You're wonderful," Anton said. "You've helped make a new man of me."

He went to the window and opened it, stood breathing in the fragrance of the grass pinks near the house. He grinned up at the pale blue sky that was dappled with fleecy clouds.

"Let it rain!" he shouted. "I'm not afraid any more. I've seen my dream come alive, and nothing happened."

He drank a little more, then grinned at them. "I have to go home and dress."

"Wait a while," said Evans. "The mechanic isn't back with the car yet. It's three miles to the railroad station."

"That's a good walk. It will do me good. Honest, I'm so glad to be alive that I'll enjoy that walk more than I can tell you."

Betty laughed, "I'm tempted to go along just so that I can watch you, Tony. I've never seen anybody so happy."

"No, no. You stay with Evans. I'll meet you at the office corner at eight. Tonight is our night to celebrate. The three of us."

HE WAVED goodbye, seeing them standing in the doorway, Evans with his arm around Betty's shoulder as she twirled a glass in her left hand. Behind them the hall light made bronze glimmerings in the shadows. Evans' coat blew aside momentarily in the warm May breeze.

Anton danced, walking along the road. The smile on his lips has come to stay. There was no fear now to put its paralyzing hand on his heart. He glanced around at the fields, at green grass swaying slightly, at trees with their freshly green leaves. This was life all around him, life that he could enjoy to the full. He thought for an instant of the grass and the flowers and how they ate just as humans ate. He wondered if they enjoyed their food as he was going to enjoy his from now on. Their food was nitrogen, oxygen and other chemicals.

He must study up on things like that, he thought. Now that his days and nights belonged to him and not to his fear, he would have plenty of time. It would make interesting reading to learn how the sciences helped the earth. He recalled reading something about the fact that the human body was just a lot of chemicals, and mostly water.

He took off his dark hat and let the wind ruffle his hair. He twisted the hat in his hands, and grinned, looking down at it. No more dark hats and dark clothes for him!

"I'm going to get a snappy sports jacket,

with checks in it," he told himself. "And light tan slacks, and brown-and-white saddle shoes, with thick rubber soles. From now on, I'm going to be a sport. Why—I'm just beginning to *live!*"

There was a shadow on the ground before him. Startled, he looked up. A black cloud had come up out of nowhere, obscuring the sun. Odd, he hadn't noticed it before. But why think about a dark cloud?

He went on gaily, whistling a tune he had danced to at the dancehall the other night. No need to be afraid of a dark cloud!

The shadows increased. They lay across meadow and hill, trees and grass and wild flowers. Anton checked his stride. He was halfway from Evans' cottage to the station. A mile and a half, either way. He looked around, but there were only open fields on all sides of him. There was no shelter here from the rain.

And it looked like rain all right.

Anton lifted his chin, bit at his lips to prevent its quivering, saying in a choked voice, "Come on, rain. I'm not afraid of you, any more."

He started to swagger down the road, but his heart thumped and pounded in his chest.

A blast of thunder rocked the earth; made it shudder wildly, so that Anton felt the ground move beneath his feet.

For one instant he stood with feet locked to the dusty road. Then he whimpered, "I—I— It was like the blast that comes in my dreams! What comes after that, when the rains come down—I—*I don't know!*"

HE licked his lips, and ran. His feet pounded on the road, raising dry dust that choked him. The day was hushed after that stentorian clap of thunder. It lay still, waiting. Over everything a pall of darkness came down, like a blanket, smothering.

The earth was black with false night. Anton could hardly see where he put his feet, but he kept on running. He ran madly. It was going to rain, any moment now. And there was no shelter.

At first there was only a drop or two. Anton felt them on his hands and face. They came faster and faster while he ran, beating about him, drumming down on the earth road. They were stinging him, he realized, like acid. He shook drops of water from his hands, moaning to himself.

His clothes were sodden, heavy with wet. Feverishly he ripped coat and shirt loose, dropped his trousers. It will be easier running, he thought.

The rain hurt. It dug and ate at his flesh. It was as though it were eating him.

He looked at his hand, lifting it. In the darkness it was hard to see, but what he saw wrenched a scream of frozen horror from his lungs.

His hand was shapeless!

No longer did his hand have fingers or a thumb! It was just a lump, like dough beaten into a formless ball. He looked at his chest, saw it, too, was changing shape.

And his feet! Good God, his feet!

They were not feet any longer. Just stubs where his ankles should be, stubs on which he thumped along, maniacally. He knew, now. He knew what happened after the burst of titanic thunder. The rain came to eat its sacrifices. It came and swept them away, washed them into the ground, let the ground absorb the chemicals in their bodies so the ground would be fertile!

He caught sight of the railroad station, but he could not run any more. It seemed that there was a sort of shack, a small house of some sort a little distance away from him, but he could not be certain.

Anyhow, he had neither arms nor legs now with which to crawl. He would have to lie here and accept what the rain did to him.

Once he gave a little moan, but after that he was silent. Soon there was nothing there to make a noise.

The disappearance of Anton Markov was rather sensational for a few days. Betty and Evans found themselves in the limelight, and there was some ugly talk, but nothing was ever proved.

There was talk of another kind near the little railroad station where Mike Murphy lived. He had a shack with a row of roses a few feet from the hut. That year the roses bloomed in red and pink and white magnificence.

Everybody asked Mike how he did it.

He was too poor to buy fertilizer.

The Silver Highway

BY HAROLD LAWLOR

IT IS only in justice to myself that I set down this complete account of the happenings in the Museum of Industry last September. In the affair of the 1905 Pope-Hartford runabout, I have known bewilderment and suffered a haunting sense of guilt. And yet the three local newspapers were most unfair at the time. One ignored my story altogether, another misspelled my name, and the third chose to treat the whole thing facetiously—as if I were a senile old fool for whom the wagon should be sent!

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

There are those who can never believe in a life after death . . . yet if they knew . . .

It is not that I wish boastfully to pose as a *deus ex machina*, but I was surely an instrument of Fate that September afternoon as I walked up the broad shallow marble steps of the Museum. For this I feel to be a certainty: it was only to someone like me—so close to death myself—that the secret of the Pope-Hartford runabout could have been revealed.

I am seventy-three years old, a retired railroad executive living on a small pension, slowly dying of an incurable disease. I have no wish to excite your pity; death, to me, will come only as a welcome release. I have no family, my friends are gone, my life's work done. No, my condition is neither sad nor pitiable.

But one can't sit around, bleakly waiting for the grave to yawn. So I have fallen into the habit of visiting the many museums for which this city is noted. And of them all the Museum of Industry interested me most on that first visit.

As a retired railroad man, the early trains —the actual coaches and locomotives themselves, not miniatures or replicas, set up on the Museum floor—fascinated me. So I lingered over them, and it wasn't until late in the afternoon that I finally visited the exhibit known as A STREET IN 1905.

I'm not sure in my own mind even now whether I should regret having entered it.

This display is housed in a separate room to itself. And it is exactly what its name implies. There's a red cobbled street, lined with shop windows filled with figures dressed in the clothing of that day. There's a nickelodeon where you may view cinemas featuring Fatty Arbuckle, Mabel Normand and other early stars of the motion picture industry—all to the tune of a jangling piano. And at intervals along the curbs there are perhaps a dozen motorcars of that era, as bright of brass and shiny of enamel as if they had at just that moment been driven from the showroom floors.

Almost you feel as if you might get in and drive away. Gas street lamps of the period flicker duskily, and it is only after your eyes have become accustomed to the dim light that you see the cars are elevated slightly on blocks of wood so that their tires might not rot from contact with the cobblestones.

The exhibit was to me a mixture of pleasure and pain. Oldsmobile, Brush, Simplex. As I recognized the different cars, I felt pang after pang of nostalgia, remembering back to that time forty years before when I, too, was young. Many of the makes were obsolete, and had been for years. Soon now, I also—

I sighed, and went slowly on. And then I stopped. There stood a Pope-Hartford runabout, proud in the splendor of its bright red paint and glittering brass headlights. I can't tell you of my delight. I almost cried out, as if meeting an old friend. For the very first car I'd ever owned had been its twin.

And so, halting, thus it was that I met—her.

"I BEG your pardon," came a voice.

I blinked in the dim light, and settled my glasses more firmly upon my nose. At first I thought her a wax figurine, placed on the front seat of the Pope-Hartford to add to the authenticity of the exhibit, for there had been other such figures in the cars I had passed. But, no.

She was dressed in a long linen duster and a linen hat, bound round with an emerald veil tied in a bow under her chin. Modish clothing for motoring—in 1905. And she was looking at me, and smiling. She wasn't beautiful, but she had the prettiness of youth. An air of breathless expectancy hovered about her, and oh! there was a lovely eager light in her eyes.

It's strange now to remember that I was not particularly startled when she spoke. Perhaps at my age one becomes like a child again, and accepts things as easily as children do. Perhaps it was just that I was a little dazed at discovering she was flesh and blood, and not a model of wax. For I didn't cry out in alarm or surprise. I just stood there, blinking a little in confusion.

"I beg your pardon," she said again, leaning forward a trifle eagerly. "I wonder if you know what's keeping Arthur?"

"Why—why, no, I don't," I said.

"Oh, dear." The car had no doors, and I could see her tiny foot tapping impatiently on the rubber-covered floorboard, "I've been waiting so long. He *said* he'd be right out." She blushed then, and cast

down her eyes, as if her impatience embarrassed her. "I suppose you're one of the wedding guests?"

I didn't know what to say. She appeared not to notice my confusion, so engrossed was she in her own thoughts.

"I've been waiting hours and hours, and *still* he doesn't come." Her pink mouth pouted prettily. "I'm so excited, and he knows excitement is bad for my heart. That's why Papa objected to our marriage just at first, you know, even though he likes Arthur so much and says he has a fine business head on his shoulders.

"And so he has, but—" She dimpled and leaned forward with a pretty air of confiding in me. "What *I* like best about him is that he has such a poetic nature, too. Last night he said, 'Soon now, Lucy, we'll be riding down that silver highway—to happiness.'"

SHE blushed, and looked at me from under her long lashes. "Isn't that lovely? Oh, I can hardly wait! If you see Arthur, will you *please* tell him to hurry?"

Her voice stopped, and she looked at me imploringly.

I put a hand to my forehead. For some minutes past I'd been feeling very odd. It had been so long since I'd had lunch that I was a little dizzy. I couldn't seem to understand what this was all about. For the first time the whole business began to strike me as queer. Why should she be sitting here all alone? She kept looking expectantly past my shoulder, but when I turned there was nothing to see save one of the lighted shop-windows in the exhibit. Everything was flickering eerily in the dim light that only emphasized the general gloom.

It was while I was standing there, wavering, uncertain how to answer but unable to move away, that a new voice spoke up.

"Is anything the matter, sir? Are you ill?"

I looked aside to find a blue-uniformed guard standing near, watching me anxiously.

"Why, no," I said. "I was just talking to the young lady."

"What young lady, sir?"

I looked at him, wondering. She was sitting there, right in front of him. He couldn't help but see her. "The young lady in the car," I said.

He looked from me to the car, and back again. His anxiety deepened, judging from his frown. "There is no young lady in the car."

I could see no point to his joke, if joke it was. The girl—she'd called herself Lucy—was still gazing expectantly past my shoulder, looking directly into the guard's face. I smiled at her uncertainly. "The attendant says you're not sitting there in the car."

She looked at me, wide-eyed. "What attendant? There's no one here but you and me."

I could feel myself going then. The lights of the exhibit, dim before, were now flashing brilliantly, on and off, like lightning. Or so it seemed. I was having trouble with my breathing, and my heart was beating in sickening, erratic tempo. I felt a strong arm across my back, just under my shoulders, supporting me.

Then everything went black.

THERE was the sharp sting of ammonia in my nostrils. I turned my head away, protesting thickly. Then someone was holding a glass to my lips. Someone was murmuring soothingly. "Take it easy now. Take it easy now, sir, and you'll be all right. There," as my eyes opened, "you're feeling better already, aren't you?"

Instantly my head cleared. I felt none of the usual bewilderment that attends a return to consciousness. I remembered distinctly, vividly, all that had happened in A STREET IN 1905.

"The girl," I mumbled. "The girl in the Pope-Hartford runabout."

"He's still dazed." It was the guard speaking to another. They flanked me on either side. We were sitting on one of the marble benches in the foyer of the Museum. "He keeps talking about a girl, and there wasn't any girl in the car."

"Poor old codger," the other said. "The exhibit probably brings back memories to him, Mullen."

I began excitedly to explain the whole thing, but they hushed me up. "Come now, sir," said Mullen, "if you're feeling better, I'm afraid you'll have to leave. It's way past closing time."

It seemed useless to protest any more, to hammer against the wall of their unbelief. Besides, I wanted time to think. I declined Mullen's offer to call me a cab, and walked down the marble steps. The Museum, if you remember, is situated in one of our large public parks. When I was far enough away to attract no attention in case the guards were still watching, I sank onto a park bench.

I was shaken by my experience, and I couldn't clarify it in my mind. How much did I actually remember, how much had I imagined? If the girl, Lucy, had really been there, why had I seen her when the guard couldn't? Why had she seen me, when she couldn't see the guard? Had they both been lying? And, if so, to what purpose? Why should they attempt to deceive me, a total stranger? It was pointless.

There remained only one plausible explanation. My illness was causing me to have hallucinations. But this theory I rejected instantly. I was positive that I hadn't imagined anything. I remembered too vividly seeing the girl, talking to her. I could describe her to the last detail, recall every word we'd exchanged.

I got to my feet, sorely puzzled. But of this much I was determined: on the morrow I would revisit the Museum of Industry.

MY ACTIONS on the next day would undoubtedly have been amusing to anyone save myself. I returned to the Museum, but for hours I pottered about, visiting every exhibit except A STREET IN 1905.

You may wonder that I didn't go there immediately. It was like this with me. For the first time in months, my curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and I had a consuming interest in life. And so I was determined to savor it as long as possible. I hesitated to return to the exhibit for fear I should find an empty motorcar containing no pretty girl, no mystery, nothing. I not only feared it, I expected it. And I knew, and was afraid, of the sick disappointment I'd feel when I learned it had all been an illusion.

There was one thing I meant to find out first, if I could. Accordingly I made my way to the office of the director of the Museum on the top floor. I paused outside the door lettered: Albert J. Hawkes, but finally brought myself to enter.

Mr. Hawkes was a fussy little man in his forties. I believe he rather welcomed my appearance, for he wasn't very busy. By indirection, I led the conversation to the real object of my visit.

"Do you have in your files," I asked, "the names of the original owners of the cars in A STREET IN 1905?"

"In some instances, yes, Mr. Ellis. Where the owner kept the car for years, finally donating it himself to the Museum. Sometimes, though, the cars were bought from dealers specializing in such things—in which case, they'd probably changed hands many times."

"I'd like to find out, if possible, who owned the Pope-Hartford runabout now in the exhibit."

"May I ask why?"

I had no intention of telling him the truth. And I was determined to avoid all mention of Lucy, for I wanted no doubts raised as to my sanity. I thought I knew what to expect, after my experience of the day before with the guards.

So I answered evasively, "I once owned a car very like it. It would please me to think it was my car that had come to rest here." Though I knew very well it was not my car. Mine had been demolished in an accident years before.

Hawkes nodded, with a tolerant smile for my vanity. He spoke into the interoffice annunciator, and presently his secretary brought in a file.

But I was doomed to disappointment.

Hawkes looked through the file, and shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry, Mr. Ellis. The Pope-Hartford runabout was bought from a dealer down in Indiana who was going out of business."

I hid my disappointment as well as I could, and shortly afterward took my leave, prepared to forget the whole thing. But after I'd lunched in the basement cafeteria, I found I couldn't bring myself to leave the Museum without another visit to A STREET IN 1905.

It was just as I'd remembered from yesterday—the red-cobbled pavement, the

shop-windows, the motorcars that were a far cry from today's streamlined models.

I'm not ashamed to confess that my heart was pounding as I approached the Pope-Hartford runabout.

But I needn't have feared.

For she was there, still looking impatiently off to the right, her expectant expression a little strained by now, her eyes seemingly a little tired.

Her smile for me was absent-minded.

"I'm sorry I left you so abruptly yesterday," I apologized. "I was taken suddenly ill."

"Yesterday?" She frowned slightly. "Why, you've only been gone a second."

I scarcely heard her. I had so little time. The guard was not in sight but he might reappear at any moment. And I had no wish to attract his attention again. I said, "Won't you tell me how you happen to be here in the Museum?"

"Museum?" She cocked her head like an inquisitive bird. "I don't understand you."

I GESTURED around, impatiently. "But surely you can see? We're here in the Museum of Industry. In the exhibit called A STREET IN 1905. You're garbed in the clothing of forty years ago. You're sitting in a car that's forty years old."

"But—that's silly! My clothes are brand-new. And so is the car." She looked at me in faint alarm.

"This is 1945," I insisted. "Why, the Museum itself wasn't built forty years ago."

She was cowering away from me. "Please go away!" she begged. "You frighten me. Nothing of what you say is true."

"But it is, it is!" I was growing excited. "Look about you! Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Stop it, stop it!" She was really frightened now. Her eyes were wide with terror. "This is no Museum. We're here on the graveled driveway. There's the *porte-cochere* overhead! There's the door to my father's house! Oh, I *wish* Arthur would come! He'll—he'll *hit* you! Yes, he will, for scaring me so! You're a horrible old man!"

"I'm telling you the truth!" I was almost beside myself. I was shouting in my effort to convince her. I was waving my arms wildly, when I felt myself grabbed roughly from behind.

"See here now, sir!" It was Mullen, back again. "You'll have to stop this!"

There were ten or twelve people behind him, all staring curiously, speaking together in alarmed whispers the while they eyed me apprehensively. Then a portly little man was pushing them aside, bustling forward importantly.

It was Hawkes, the Museum director.

"What's all this to-do, Mullen?" he asked the guard testily.

"It's this old gentleman, Mr. Hawkes. He's creating a disturbance. He was in here yesterday and was taken ill, raving about some girl he said he could see in this car. He's probably harmless enough, but a little—you know." Mullen made a circular motion with his forefinger at the side of his head.

"I'm *not* crazy!" I sputtered, outraged. "I'm only trying to convince the young lady in the car here—"

"Come now, my dear sir, we simply can't have this sort of thing going on here in the Museum at all." Mr. Hawkes laid his hand gently enough on my arm. "There's no young lady in the car, as anyone can see for himself."

I looked around. The others present were nodding their heads in agreement. I forced myself to speak quietly.

"Just a minute, please." I shook off Hawkes' hand, and turned to the girl in the car. "Lucy, please believe that I have no desire to frighten you. But all that I told you is true. There are a dozen other people here besides myself. Can you see them?"

She shook her head doubtfully. "Only you."

"And they can't see you. I'm the only one who can."

She sensed at last the sincerity in my voice. She must have. Sick dismay was dawning in her eyes. "But then—what has happened to me?" Terror replaced dismay. "I'm afraid. Afraid! Oh, can't someone help me?" She looked about imploringly. Then, with a strangled sob, she covered her face with her hands and began to weep hopelessly, hunching her shoulders like a

forlorn bird in the rain trying to cover itself with its wings.

If I had had only a moment more then, I think I might have learned the truth. But Hawkes was tugging impatiently at my arm.

"Really now, sir," he stuttered. "I must insist that you leave. It's for your own good. I feel you are unwell."

I did what I could. I protested vehemently. I gave them my card bearing my name and address, and begged that they investigate me. But they ignored my request. Hawkes and Mullen tightened their grips on my arm. They wanted only to get rid of me, to get me out of the Museum, presumably before I grew violent. And I knew that, try as I would to enter again, I was barred from the Museum forever more. They'd give out my description to all guards, and I'd be denied entrance at the door.

Gently they hustled me from the exhibit. I strained my eyes, looking back through the dimness. The last I saw of her, Lucy was still huddled there in her finery, crying quietly, hopelessly, on the front seat of the Pope-Hartford runabout.

I RETURNED home, common sense telling me I should try to dismiss from my mind the whole affair. But I slept poorly that night and next day I knew it was useless. I couldn't forget the sick despair in Lucy's eyes. I'd torn the veil, destroying her illusion of happiness. I must tear it yet a little more, trying to learn the truth. I must help her, or I'd never rest peacefully.

There was only one thing to do. Investigate for myself. The problem was where to begin. It seemed hopeless. The trail was so old. And then it occurred to me that surely there couldn't have been many Pope-Hartford runabouts on the road in 1905. And hardly more than one whose owner's first name was Arthur. To be sure, the car may never have been registered in this city, but that was the chance I had to take.

Luckily, this city is the capital of the state. I looked up the address of the license bureau and went down there. They weren't eager to look through their files for comparatively ancient and dusty tomes, but a greenback discreetly slipped into the hand of one of the attendants gained me entrance to the vault itself where the books were kept. After a prolonged search, I found the volume of registrations for 1905.

Going through the book was slow work and tedious, for there were more cars registered that year than one would have supposed. But at last I found it. A Pope-Hartford runabout registered in the name of Arthur H. Comstock of 194 Beverley Drive.

I dropped in at the nearest drugstore and looked at the telephone directory. And here I drew a blank. There was no Arthur H. Comstock listed in the directory at all.

Well, that was that. Dejectedly I boarded a streetcar for home. But I hadn't gone two blocks before I was excitedly ringing the bell to stop the car. Of course! The suburban directory! After all, forty years had elapsed. The man might have followed the trend to the suburbs.

My hunch was proved right. There was an Arthur H. Comstock on Roscommon Place, out in Glen Oaks. I was shaking with excitement and hope as I boarded the interurban.

A FILIPINO man-servant admitted me to Arthur Comstock's home after taking my card, vanishing for minutes, and returning with his employer's permission to let me in.

Comstock was perhaps five years younger than myself—a tall, thin man with white hair, cold eyes, and an embittered expression on his face. He was wearing a dinner jacket, and on the left lapel was a decoration I recognized—the tiny bright red ribbon of the Legion of Honor.

He was standing before the fireplace looking at my card in a puzzled manner as I entered diffidently, but he thawed enough to ask me to sit down. Now that I was there, I felt decidedly uncomfortable and at a loss as to know just how to begin.

There was nothing else to do. I plunged. "Mr. Comstock, I believe you were once the owner of a Pope-Hartford runabout?"

I was hardly prepared for his reaction to my question. For a second he looked stunned, then ill. He turned the color of

unset cement. And then the angry red surged into his face.

"Who are you?" he clipped. "What do you mean by coming in here and asking—"

I said, "Please. Won't you hear me out? I've been very much disturbed these last few days. Do you know that the car, which I believe to be yours, is on exhibit in the Museum of Industry?"

His eyes were fixed on me coldly. "I know nothing about it. I sold it long ago. But, even so, I can't possibly conceive your object—"

He broke off. But he seemed rather wary. Anyone could guess that in some manner the Pope-Hartford runabout had played an important part in his life. It had been more than a means of transportation or source of pleasure. And because I sensed this so very strongly it gave me the courage to go on.

"Is there any reason," I asked, "why someone should be waiting for you in the Pope-Hartford runabout? A young girl, in a linen duster, with an emerald veil? A girl with hazel eyes and soft brown hair? A girl named—Lucy?"

I stopped, appalled. Comstock was staring at me. His mouth was opening and closing soundlessly. And on his face there was a well-nigh indescribable expression. An expression compounded weirdly of horror and nausea and malevolence. For a moment I thought he meant to attack me. And then he collapsed, utterly and completely. I was never more alarmed in my life.

There was a decanter on a stand, next to the divan on which he'd fallen. I took it upon myself to pour him a drink, place it in his shaking hands. He tried to refuse it. He kept shaking his head, like a man with palsy.

"Get out!" he muttered hoarsely. "Get out! I don't know who you are, but—"

"I had no idea—" I began helplessly, guiltily. My own hands were shaking in reaction.

By a visible effort, he regained control of himself, and his face was an icy mask of barely restrained fury and resentment. "You're a feature writer, I suppose," he sneered. "Anything for a story. Raking over the dust of forty years like a ghoul, exposing the grief and unhappiness of others to earn a miserable dollar for yourself. Get out of my house!"

I stood my ground. I'd started this and I meant to finish it.

"I'm as unhappy about this as yourself," I said. "I've had no rest for two days—not since she spoke to me in the Museum."

AND quickly, before he could halt me, I poured out the story of the girl in the exhibit. He listened. Unwillingly at first, but he listened. And as I hurried on eagerly, my words almost tripping over themselves in my haste, I could see reluctant belief begin to dawn in his eyes, to grow, until at last he was listening raptly with a far-away look on his face. I knew he was no longer even aware of my presence. I knew he believed.

"Lucy," he said softly. *"Lucy!"*

"You can't misunderstand me now," I finished. "What would be my object in making up so preposterous a story? What have I to gain? Surely you can see it's only for my own peace of mind that I've persisted in following up what clues I had?"

He said heavily, "Sit down, Mr.—Ellis."

"You do know the girl?" I asked eagerly. "There is some story about the Pope-Hartford runabout?"

His face was drawn and haggard as he nodded. "Yes. She was my wife. Forty years ago, Mr. Ellis, we were married. The reception was held at her father's house. I parked the Pope-Hartford runabout under the *porte-cochere* at the side. It was new; I'd just bought it for our honeymoon trip. Our friends knew nothing about it. They thought we were leaving in the carriage at the front door. The carriage was only a decoy, of course, for them to tie their signs and tin cans on."

He had a faint smile for the memory of that past gaiety.

"Well, the plan was that I should hold them back, while Lucy changed into her going-away clothes, and slipped down a back stairway to wait for me in the car. I'd join her there, and then we'd be off, giving our friends the slip—"

The faint smile had faded. And I've never seen such sadness in the eyes of a human being.

"And then?" I prompted softly. Though I really didn't need to hear.

He looked at me numbly. "When I joined her, she was sitting erect in the front seat. I thought she had fallen asleep. But when I touched her gently to awaken her, she slumped forward. She was dead, Mr. Ellis, of a heart attack brought on by the excitement. Dead, and we hadn't yet begun to live! I'd loved her deeply. I was nearly insane in my grief."

His hands opened emptily, and he sighed. "Well, and that was the end of it, the shattering of a dream. As for the car, I couldn't stand the sight of it. I never wanted to see it again. It lay there in her father's driveway for weeks until finally I had someone tow it away, and it was sold. And that was the last I ever heard of it. But now—now—"

He looked at me bleakly. "I've never been able to believe in a life after death, Mr. Ellis. In my bitterness at losing Lucy, I've lived life to the full, plunging into experiences sometimes sordid, grabbing anything I cared to take, feeling it was no more than my due. Because Life itself, you see, had cheated me of the only thing I'd ever really wanted. But if I thought Lucy had been waiting faithfully all these years, while I—" He winced, and added, low, "Ah, what must she think of me?"

I glanced away. It seemed indecent to look at the naked pain in his face. I said, "I wish you'd go to the Museum with me tomorrow afternoon. Will you?"

And he said, "Yes." But his voice was dull. As dull as his eyes.

I left him there alone. And though he'd made the appointment with me readily enough for the next afternoon, I felt the first faint qualms of distrust. Had he been right? Were it better I had not stirred up the dust of forty years?

And oh! would Lucy *see* him?

I DREAMED of her that night. Or was it a dream? There was the gentlest of caresses upon my cheek, the lightest of butterfly kisses. My hand went up to touch the spot where warm pink lips had rested briefly.

"Thank you!" she said. "Oh, *thank* you!"

It was Lucy's voice. And she was happy. I couldn't doubt it. Her happiness was almost a tangible thing. And suddenly I knew. And suddenly it no longer mattered that I was slowly dying. For Death, I knew at last, was not an awesome thing, a specter to be feared. Why, Death could be beautiful! You had only to hear Lucy's voice to know.

But why was she thanking me?

Was it a dream?

It was in the morning that Mrs. Langdon, my landlady, knocked at my door. "Some gentlemen to see you, Mr. Ellis."

Her voice seemed to waver uncertainly on the world "gentlemen," and she looked at me strangely when I opened my door. "They're waiting for you in the parlor, sir."

There was something odd about her manner, but I went directly downstairs. Two policemen were standing there. And with them was Hawkes, the director of the Museum of Industry.

"This is the man," he said to the policemen upon my appearance.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

One of the officers spoke up. "I'll tell you frankly, sir, we have no warrant for your arrest. But we think it'd be to your own interest to come along with us for questioning."

"But I'm expecting a caller," I protested.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ellis," Hawkes said. "But I know you'll find this more important. It isn't that we suspect you, exactly—after all, there's the question of your age—and, frankly—"

He was growing incoherent. He broke off, mopped his brow. "I detest mystery!" he said fretfully, and looked at me as if something were my fault.

My curiosity was such, by now, that I would have accompanied them any place. But they took me only to the Museum of Industry, up the familiar marble steps, into the private office of Mr. Hawkes.

And behind Hawkes' desk sat a man they introduced as Inspector Shrewsbury. On his right sat the guard, Mullen.

"That's the man!" Mullen cried excitedly as I entered. "The one who was hanging around the car, acting so funny."

I said quietly, "Perhaps if you'll be good enough to tell me what this is all about—?"

Inspector Shrewsbury was eyeing me in-

tently. "The Pope-Hartford automobile, in which you were so interested, was stolen during the night."

"Stolen?" I hadn't quite expected that. "But—"

"Exactly!" cried little Mr. Hawkes excitedly. "I tell you, it's impossible! The Museum's doors are locked, the guards, the alarm system—" He was growing incoherent again. "The car *couldn't* have been stolen!"

"Yet," Shrewsbury pointed out gently, "the car *is* gone. We'd like you to tell us, Mr. Ellis, just why you were so interested in that particular automobile."

I WAS shaken. I knew they'd never believe my story. But there was nothing for it. I asked if I might sit down, and then I told them all I knew about the Pope-Hartford runabout. Told them of my investigations, and my interview with Arthur Comstock, omitting no detail—every least word exchanged with Lucy and Arthur, every minute detail of their appearance, even to the French decoration Arthur wore in his lapel. I flatter myself that mine is a photographic memory, despite my age.

They listened in silence until I had finished.

"If you call Mr. Comstock, I'm sure he'll be glad to verify everything I've said," I ended.

Shrewsbury and Hawkes and Mullen exchanged glances. Plainly they all entertained doubts of my sanity. Nevertheless, Shrewsbury pulled the desk phone toward him and dialed.

When his call was answered, he asked for Mr. Comstock. And then it seemed to me he listened for minutes without saying a word, while my tension mounted. He had a poker face, but his eyes narrowed as he listened.

"Did you know Mr. Comstock well?" he asked when he'd hung up finally.

I knew something was wrong. "I never met him before last night. Tell me, what has happened?"

Shrewsbury hesitated, then shrugged. "Comstock shot and killed himself, sometime just before dawn."

I think I must have known what his answer would be. I felt no shock. But there was something—

Lucy. Where was Lucy?

"I'd like to go to A STREET IN 1905," I said.

Wordlessly they accompanied me. And there on the cobbled street was the vacant space where the Pope-Hartford runabout had stood. Seemingly it had vanished into thin air.

Only the four wooden blocks that had held it yet remained.

But I hoped. I hoped that somewhere, some place, two light-hearted people were riding down that silver highway—to happiness.

I told them so. Shrewsbury, Mullen, and Hawkes.

"Of course, I don't expect you to believe me," I said defensively.

But I didn't really care. *I* believed. What did it matter if they—

Shrewsbury stood motionless, staring thoughtfully down at the red cobblestones. Then he uttered a wordless exclamation, and stooped in the dim light to pick up something. When he stood erect again, he held out his hand.

And resting on the palm of it was the tiny bright red ribbon of the Legion of Honor. . . .

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Frozen Fear

By ROBERT BLOCH

WALTER KRASS used to cut his fingernails over the kitchen sink.

Ruby would give him hell if she found any nail parings lying around. Ruby was like that. She enjoyed giving him hell in one form or another.

Krass was used to that, after four years of marriage.

But one afternoon he came home early from the office and found that Ruby had gone out. While rummaging around in a bureau drawer, looking for a tobacco pouch, Walter Krass happened to find some old nail parings.

They were imbedded in the body of a little wax doll—a tiny mannikin with a mop of brown hair and a curiously familiar face.

Walter Krass recognized his hair in the doll, and the features had been moulded to resemble his own.

Then he knew that Ruby was trying to kill him.

He looked at the little wax figure for a long moment, then dropped it into the drawer again and covered it with a pile of Ruby's handkerchiefs.

Krass padded out of the bedroom and sat down in the parlor. His pudgy little body slumped in the easy chair, and he ran stubby fingers through his sandy brown cowlick.

He felt shocked, but not surprised. Ruby had Cajun blood, and in her hatred of him she would resort to Cajun superstitions. He knew she hated him, of course.

But this attempt on his life was another matter.

It could mean only one thing. Somehow, Ruby had found out about Cynthia.

Yes. She knew. And her reaction was

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

You don't realize 'til you try how hard *it is to chop up the human body*

typical. Ruby would never think of a separation, or a divorce. She'd rather kill him.

Krass shrugged. He wasn't worried about wax images, or herb-poisons, or any of the childish Cajun methods she might employ. He could destroy dolls and avoid eating unusually flavored foods.

But he couldn't destroy her intention—her purpose. And sooner or later she would abandon her silly beliefs and resort to direct action. A knife, or a bullet. Yes, Ruby would do just that.

Unless—

Unless he acted first.

Suppose he just quietly turned his assets into cash and left town with Cynthia some night?

It was a tempting notion, but of course it wouldn't work. Ruby would find him. She'd put them on his trail; ruin him, ruin Cynthia. She'd make trouble for him as long as she lived.

As long as she lived—

Walter Krass snapped his fingers. They made a curious echoing sound in the room. Like a death-rattle.

Ruby's death-rattle, for instance. . . .

RUBY was out shopping again in the night Walter Krass brought the deep-freeze unit home.

He hauled it over on the trailer and sneaked it down to the cellar. It was hooked up and working by the time she arrived.

Ruby was all set to fix supper, but he suggested she come down to the cellar with him.

"I have a surprise for you," he announced.

Ruby loved surprises.

She lost no time following him down the cellar stairs. For once, she fairly bubbled with high spirits, and it pleased Krass to see her in such good humor.

"Oh Walter, I'm so excited! What can it be?"

Krass gestured and pointed around the cellar. "Take a look, Ruby. Notice anything different?"

Then she saw it.

"Walter! Not really? A deep-freeze unit—just what I've always wanted!"

"Like it?"

"Oh, it's a wonderful surprise, darling!"

Krass stepped back as she bent over the unit. Then he cleared his throat.

"But that's not the real surprise," he said.

"Isn't it?"

"No. I have another surprise for you, Ruby."

"*Another* one? What is it?"

"This," said Krass.

He gave her the real surprise, then. A poker, in the back of the head.

IT TOOK Krass a long time to do what he had to do—even though the cleaver was sharp. He had a pile of old newspapers and some butcher's paper. It was necessary to make six separate bundles before he could fit Ruby's remains into the freezing compartment of the small unit.

Krass was glad when he finished and put the packages in the deep-freeze. He turned the lock handle and sighed. He had never realized that chopping up a woman's body would be such hard work.

Well, live and learn. . . .

Krass turned and surveyed the cellar. Everything was in order. A bit of mopping had done the trick as far as any stains were concerned. The poker was back in place, the cleaver was tucked away in the corner once more, and the papers disposed of down the drain.

The deep-freeze hummed away, squatting and purring in the gloom like some monstrous beast that has just dined well.

Walter Krass hummed a bit himself as he went upstairs. He was sweating, but merely from exertion—not from fright. Strange. He'd expected fright, shock, revulsion. Instead, there was just a sense of relief. Relief at the thought of escaping Ruby forever; escaping her animal vitality, her overwhelming energy, her frenzied possessiveness which used to assume the proportions of a positive aura.

Well, it was over now. And why should he be afraid? After all, he had a plan, and a good one.

Now it was time to put that plan into action.

Krass went straight to the telephone and called Cynthia.

She answered immediately; she had been waiting for the call.

Their conversation was short but sweet. Krass hung up the receiver knowing that all was well. They were rolling, now.

Early in the morning, Cynthia would be taking the train for Reno. She had papers, photographs, all the necessary items; even some of Ruby's clothes that Krass smuggled out for her. Cynthia had practised Ruby's mannerisms for hours, just as she concentrated on imitating her handwriting.

It was set. Cynthia, travelling under the name of Mrs. Ruby Krass, would arrive in Reno, establish residence, and obtain a divorce. Exit, Ruby.

And at this end—

All Krass had to do was wait. Wait for the summer to end. Wait for house-heating time. Then, a nice little fire in the furnace, stoked by six packages from the deep-freeze unit.

Exit, Ruby.

That was that. Sell the house, clear out, join Cynthia on the Coast. Everything was neatly wrapped up—just as neatly as those packages downstairs in the deep-freeze.

Krass took a drink on that.

It was too early to go to bed, so he had another. Then a third. After all, it *had* been a strain. He could admit that to himself, now. He deserved a little relaxation. Another drink, for instance—

That fourth drink brought relaxation. Krass leaned his head back in the armchair. His eyes closed. His mouth opened. Everything was quiet . . . very quiet. . . .

Except for the *bumping*.

THE sound seemed to come from the stairs—the *cellar* stairs. The noise didn't resemble footsteps at all; just a *bumping*. Something was flopping and thudding, and then it was rolling, rolling closer and closer.

Ruby's head rolled into the room.

Just her head.

It stopped about a yard away from where Krass was slouching in his chair. He could have stretched out his leg and touched the upturned face with his foot, if he wanted to.

He didn't want to.

The face glared at him, and then the lips parted. Lips don't part when the head is severed—but then, severed heads don't roll, either.

But here it was. And the lips *were* parted.

Krass heard her whispering.

"Can you hear me, Walter? You think I'm dead, don't you? You think you killed me and locked me away, forever. Well, you're wrong, Walter. You couldn't kill me. You couldn't lock me away.

"Oh, you killed my body all right, and locked that away. But you couldn't kill my hate. You can't lock my hatred away. It will seek you out, Walter—seek you out and destroy you!"

SHE was talking nonsense, melodramatic nonsense. Yes, the head of the dead woman was talking nonsense, all right. But Krass listened, anyway.

He listened as Ruby's voice told him *everything*. All about his plans with Cynthia. All about her trip, and the divorce, and selling the house, and going away. She knew everything, it seemed.

"You meant to keep my body in the deep-freeze until fall, until you could build a fire in the furnace and burn it. That was a clever idea of yours, Walter.

"But it won't work. Because I'm not staying in that deep-freeze. My hatred won't let me. We Cajuns know how to hate, Walter. And we know how to kill—even from beyond the grave!

"You don't dare run away from this house and leave my body here. And you don't dare to build a fire until fall comes. It would arouse suspicion.

"So you're trapped here, Walter. Trapped, do you hear?"

Walter Krass didn't hear. The words were lost in the sound of his own gasping. It was the gasping that caused him to awake.

The minute he opened his eyes he knew it was a dream. There was nobody there with him—no head staring up.

But he had to be sure, quite sure.

That was why he went back down into the cellar. He cursed himself for a drunken, over-imaginative fool the minute he switched on the light down there. Naturally, everything was all right.

The deep-freeze hummed its merry

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little song over in the corner. The lock was still set.

Just out of curiosity, Krass turned the lock handle and slid the door back.

A wave of cold air hit his face as he bent and examined the packages. Nothing was missing, of course. All six of the bundles were still there.

Except that the big package . . . the *round* package . . . the one Krass had put on the bottom . . . was now right on top!

KRASS got out of the cellar, fast, but not until he made sure that the deep-freeze was securely locked once more.

By the time he got upstairs again he knew it was just a mistake. It *had* to be. It was just a nightmare—the voice of his own conscience.

The next morning Krass felt all right again. He phoned Cynthia's apartment. No answer. That was good—it meant she had really left for Reno. Things would work out now, if only he kept his nerve.

He put down the telephone and went out to the kitchen to make breakfast.

It was then that he saw it, lying on the floor near the cellar steps.

It wasn't much to look at. Just a little strip of butcher's paper—a little, bloody strip of butcher's paper that might have come off a bundle of meat!

Krass was a brave man. He didn't gasp, or faint, or hide under the bed.

He marched down the steps into the cellar and opened the deep-freeze unit. He didn't have to unlock it—it was unlocked.

There were only *five* packages in the unit now.

One of the bundles was missing!

Krass turned away, hanging onto the edge of the deep-freeze for support. He locked it and walked over to the corner to pick up the cleaver.

Then, cleaver in hand, he began to search the cellar.

He didn't even dare admit to himself just *what* he was looking for. It had been a long, thin package—and he could imagine something crawling around in the cellar shadows like a big white snake. But he couldn't find it.

After a while, Krass went upstairs. He still carried the cleaver, just in case. But *it*

wasn't upstairs. It wasn't *anywhere.* It was hiding. Yes, hiding.

Sooner or later, he'd fall asleep. Then it would come out. It would slither across the floor, wind around his neck and strangle him.

Yes—it was no dream. Ruby's body was still alive down there; alive and filled with hate.

She was right. Krass couldn't go away, because they'd break in sooner or later and find her there. He couldn't light a fire, either, in midsummer.

So he would have to stay here. That's what she wanted. He would stay here and fall asleep, and then she'd—

No. It mustn't be that way.

Better to take the risk and run away. If he was clever, perhaps they wouldn't find him. Ruby's absence was accounted for by Cynthia, posing as her in Reno.

Maybe if he spread the story of the "divorce" around and said he was leaving to follow Ruby and persuade her to return—that might do the trick. Then he could meet Cynthia there and they'd hide out together. They could go to Mexico, anywhere.

Yes. That was the way. The only way. And he'd better not wait any longer.

"Trapped, do you hear me?"

Well, he wouldn't stay trapped. He'd get out, now.

Krass went upstairs and started packing his suitcase. There was no time for a careful selection—he took what clothes and articles he really needed and let the rest go. He'd travel light and travel fast.

The case held everything he needed, except money. That was in the wall-safe in the dining-room he'd converted into a "library."

He lugged his suitcase downstairs to the hall, set it down, and went into the library to get the cash. There was about eight hundred dollars in small bills, plus his bonds, insurance policies, and bank book. He'd stop at the bank on his way to the office. Better think up a good sob-story for the bunch down there.

It seemed to him, as he turned the corner, that a shadow scuttled across the floor. But shadows don't scuttle. And shadows don't make a *thumping* noise. . . .

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Walter Krass stared down at his suitcase. It wasn't locked and closed any more. It was open. Open—and *unpacked!*

His clothing lay littered all over the hall floor.

And from the cellar stairs came the sound of thumping . . . a faint, receding thumping. . . .

Yes. Something was crawling back into the cellar. He couldn't let it get away this time. It could open the windows, it could follow him. But he wouldn't permit it to escape!

Krass ran upstairs to the bedroom. He'd left the cleaver on the bed. This time he'd make a thorough search. First of all, he'd take all the rest of the packages out of the deep-freeze and chop them to bits. Then he'd find the missing bundle and give it the same treatment.

Chop everything into little bits. That was the way!

Panting heavily, he ran down the stairs and made for the cellar steps. He shifted the cleaver to his left hand as he clicked on the cellar light switch. Now he could see everything down there. Nothing would escape him. Nothing would escape the cleaver.

The deep-freeze unit hummed. The droning seemed to blur into a mocking frenzy of sound as Krass slid the lid open and peered down into the cold depths.

It was empty.

The packages were gone. *All* the packages were gone!

Krass straightened up. He gripped the handle of the cleaver and whirled around to face the cellar walls.

"I'm not afraid," he shouted. "I know you're down here! But I have the cleaver. Before I leave, I'll find you—and chop you into bits!"

A sharp click put a period to his words.

It was the click of the wall-switch at the head of the stairs. The lights had been turned out!

"Ruby!" he shrieked. "Ruby—you've turned out the lights. But I'll find you! I can still hear you, Ruby!"

It was true. He *could* hear.

The rustling was all around him. A soft, brittle sound, like the unwrapping of paper from a parcel. From several parcels.

There was a slithering, too, and a thumping.

Krass edged back until he stood against the wall. He whirled the cleaver around in darkness. He began to swing it in a wide arc across the floor at his feet.

But the thudding and bumping went on. It came closer, and closer.

Suddenly Krass began to chop at the floor with his cleaver. He rasped out great racking gouts of laughter as he hacked away at the air.

Something was slithering around behind him. He felt the coldness all over him now . . . the touch of icy fingers, the kiss of frigid lips, the clammy caress of a frozen hand. And then the icy band was tight around his neck.

The scream was cut off. The cleaver clattered to the floor. Krass felt the coldness constricting his windpipe, felt himself falling back into a greater coldness. He fell into the coldness but he didn't know, because everything was freezing, freezing. . . .

IT WAS weeks later when Cynthia was exposed as an impostor in Reno, and almost a month had passed before they actually broke into the Krass residence.

Even after entering the house, it took fifteen minutes of preliminary searching before Lieutenant Lee of the Homicide Squad went down into the cellar.

Another fifteen minutes were spent in frantic conjecture and incredulous surmise.

It was then, and only then, that Lee put through his phone call.

"Hello . . . this Burke? Lee, Homicide. Yes . . . we're at the house now. Found a body in the cellar—locked in a deep-freeze unit.

"No . . . it was a man. Walter Krass.

"His wife? Yeah . . . we found her, all right. Chopped into pieces, lying all around the deep-freeze. All but her right arm.

"Missing? No, it isn't missing. It's on top of the deep-freeze. I said, it's on top of the deep-freeze, holding the lock shut.

"I don't know how to tell you this . . . but it almost looks like that arm pushed Walter Krass into the deep-freeze and then —locked him in!"

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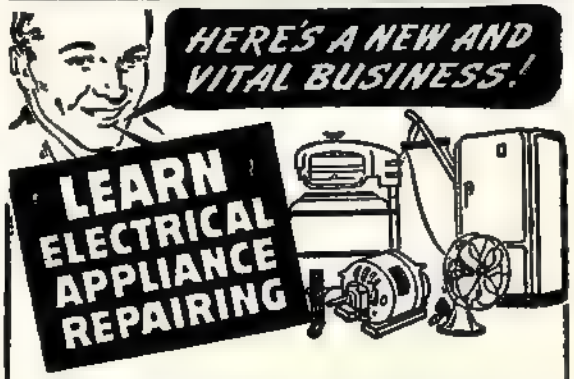

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WE ARE both pleased and proud to have one of our WEIRD TALES writers "cop" first prize in the recent short story contest sponsored by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, competing against many of the best "big-name" authors in this country.

That pleasure and pride is intensified by the fact that the winner is a long-time contributor to these pages and, in addition, a good friend of ours and of all WEIRD TALES' readers. He is Manly Wade Wellman, who adorns this magazine with happy regularity.

Wellman's prize-winning yarn was entitled *A Star for a Warrior* and introduced not only a new detective, but a new kind of detective—an American Indian (a subject on which, as you customers know, M. W. W. knows aplenty).

Our feeling on hearing the good news was, it couldn't happen to a better guy. Apparently the judges, headed by the eminent Christopher Morley, thought so too!

Notes on a Ghost

"YOU might be interested to know," writes Dorothy Quick to us all, "that I actually met up with *The Man in Purple*. He was a real ghost in a real Paris Hotel and his choking propensities were real too. I only spent one night in the room, deciding that one sleepless night was enough!

"I wasn't brave enough to stay on. However, some day I may go back and see if he's still there. I imagine he is. He seemed a very persistent kind of a ghost!"

Yes, we'd be interested to hear about *The Man in Purple*. Perhaps eventually we can

find out—through the investigations of Dorothy Quick, of course. For paraphrasing the old rhyme, our feeling on ghosts is, we'd rather hear-about than see one!

NEW MEMBERS

Jimmie Lunsford, 921 So. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles 6, Calif.
Rose Lee Smith, c/o M. C. Starkey, 935 North 5th St., Steubenville, Ohio
William Golden, 70-21 65th Place, Glendale, N. Y.
Kay Haney, Huntsville, Ark.
John A. Smarter, Box 745, Port Neches, Tex.
Robert Dickhoff, 749 3th Ave., New York 16, N. Y.
William H. Baxter, Windward Ave., White Plains, N. Y.
Lewis R. Sale, 209 E. Maple St., Jeffersonville, Ind.
Martha Ann Quinby, 6324 18th N.E., Seattle 5, Wash.
H. Earl Tyler, Box 175, Glasgow, Mont.
Dee Gills, 191 Clinton St., Brooklyn 2, N. Y.
Irene La France, Belmont Station, Downers Grove, Ill.
Billy George, 638 Alahmar Terrace, San Gabriel, Calif.
Betty Campbell, Bube, Que., Can.
Robert Cadwell, 239 High St., Closter, N. J.
Friend La Bonte, Box 125, Lennoxville, P. Q., Can.
Norman Kagen, 124 Fort George Ave., New York 33, N. Y.
Charles R. Upham, 270 Concession St., Hamilton, Ont., Can.
Erma E. Morehead, 2185 Leffingwell Rd., Norwalk, Calif.
Henry Speer, 270 McGregor Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., Can.
George M. Gray, Jr., Chapel Hill, Triadelphia, W. Vt.
William J. Ashton, 317 West 13th St., Norfolk, Va.
David F. Usher, 39-12 56th St., Woodside, L. I., N. Y.
Helen Woznick, Rt. 6, Box 506, Mt. Clemens, Mich.
Calvin John Henniger, 9110 14th St., Detroit 6, Mich.
Pearl Brody, 1665 Townsend Ave., New York 53, N. Y.
Barbara Jones, 402 Kent Rd., Bala-Cynwyd, Pa.
Jack Grubel, 392 E. 19th St., Paterson, N. J.
Don Connolly, 127 S. 1st St., Seward, Nebr.
Harry McElhay, Jr., 10720 Maple Leaf Dr., St. John Woods, Portland, Oregon
Mrs. Quinton Usserv, 52 Shipside Apts., Wilmington, Del.
Alfred J. Quirk, 417 E. 137th St., New York 54, N. Y.
John F. Gay, III, 1512 N. 30th St., Birmingham 14, Ala.
Donald V. Sharkelton, 7 Maple Ave., Sidney, N. Y.
L. M. Kreachel, 25 Earl Pl., Buffalo 11, N. Y.
Mark Mersereau, 9405 Burlington Blvd., Congress Park, Ill.
Kemle Turner, 900 South 11th St., Mt. Vernon, Wn.
John Kraus, 37 Fowler Ave., Lynbrook, N. Y.
Bill Nieman, 174 S. Orange Ave., South Orange, N. Y.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

READERS' VOTE

THE VALLEY OF THE GODS	THE SMILING PEOPLE
THREE IN CHAINS	ONCE THERE WAS AN ELEPHANT
MIDNIGHT	RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY!
THE MAN IN PURPLE	THE SILVER HIGHWAY
FROZEN FEAR	

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

WEIRD TALES

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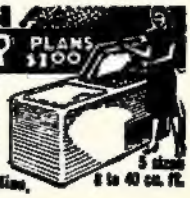

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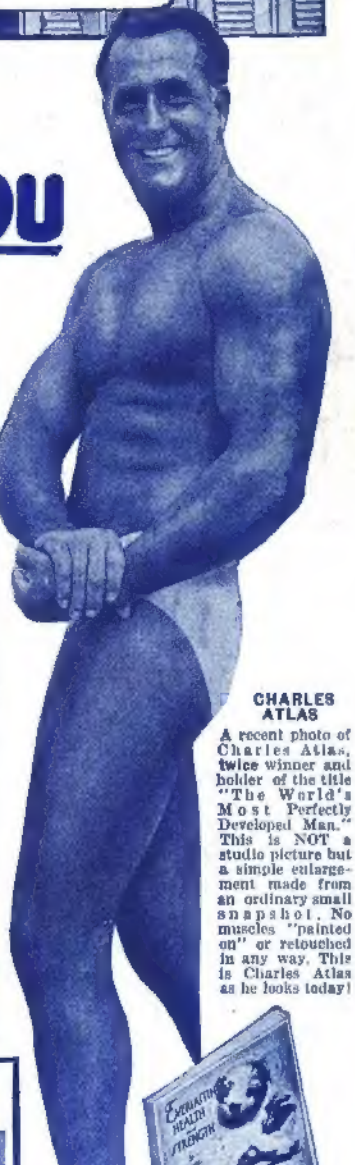

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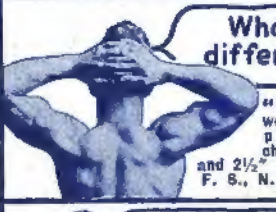
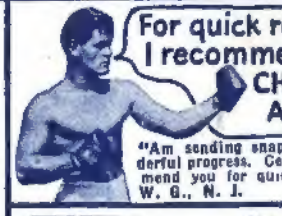
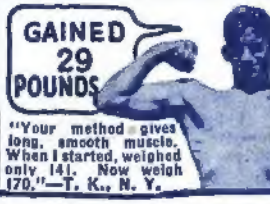


"Started a week ago. Have put 3½" on chest (normal) and 2½" expanded."—F. S., N. Y.



"Am sending snapshot of wonderful progress. Certainly recommend you for quick results."—W. G., N. J.



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